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OLD KENSINGTON BY MISS THACKERAY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

THE STORY OF ELIZABETH . . . . 1 vol.
THE VILLAGE ON THE CLIFF . . . 1 vol.

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OLD KENSINGTON

BY

MISS THACKERAY,

AUTHOR OF "THE STORY OF ELIZABETH."

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ
1873.

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OLD KENSINGTON

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OLD KENSINGTON.

CHAPTER I.

WAVE OR FLAME.

And you have gained a ring.
What of it? 'Tis a figure, a symbol, say
A thing's sign.

R. BROWNING.

How sweet they are, those long sunset evenings on the river! the stream, flowing by swift and rippling, reflects the sky—sometimes, in the still gleams and depths of dying light, it would seem as if the sky itself reflected the waters. The distant woods stand out in bronzed shadow; low sunset fires burn into dusk beyond the fringe of trees; sudden sweet glooms fall upon the boats as they glide in and out by dim creeks and ridges. Perhaps some barge travels past through the twilight, drawn by horses tramping along the towing-path, and dragging against the sky. As the boats float shorewards, peaceful sights and sounds are all about, borne upon the flowing water.

"I am so sorry it is over," said Dolly, tying on her straw hat.

The sun was setting, a little star was shining overhead, the last bird had flown home to its nest. Robert

pushed them right through a bed of rustling reeds on their way to the landing-place. It was crowded with dancing boats; many people were standing along the shore; the gables of the "Red Lion" had been all aglow for a few minutes past. They could hear the laugh of a boating-party scrambling to land. Here and there heads were peeping from the bridge, from the landing-places and windows; some twinkled with the last sunset gleams, others with lights already burning. Dolly had been silent for the last half-hour, scarcely listening to its desultory talk. They had exchanged broadsides with George and John Morgan in the other boat; but by degrees that vigorously-manned craft had outrun them, rounded a corner, and left them floating mid-stream. Robert was in no hurry, and Frank was absent, and sometimes almost forgot to row. Looking up now and then, he saw Dolly's sweet face beaming beneath her loose straw hat, with Hampton Court and all its prim terraces for a background.

"You are not doing your share of the work, Raban, by any means," said Robert, labouring and not over-pleased.

"Oh, let us float," murmured Mrs. Palmer. She was leaning over the side of the boat, weighing it heavily down, and dabbling one fat white hand in the water; with the other she was clasping Dolly's stiff young fingers. "Truant children!" she said, "you don't know your own happiness. How well I remember one evening just like this, Dolly, when your papa and I were floating down the Hooghly; and, now that I

think of it, my Admiral Palmer was with us—he was captain then. How little we either of us thought in those days. The Palmers are so close one needs a lifetime to understand their ways. I should like to show you a letter, Mr. Raban, that I received only this morning from my sister-in-law, Joanna—was that a fish or a little bit of stick? Sweet calm! Robert, I am thankful you have never been entangled by one of those ugly girls at Smokethwaite. I know Joanna and her——"

"There was never any thought, I assure you," interrupted Robert, not displeased, and unable to refrain from disclaiming the accusation. "My aunt has always been most kind; she would never have wished to influence my inclinations—she is very much tried just now, parting from Jonah, who joins his regiment immediately. They are coming up to London with him next Saturday."

"Ah! I know what it is to part from one's child," said Philippa, tapping Dolly's fingers. "I am glad to hear Joanna shows *any* feeling. My Dolly, if it were not to Robert, who is so thoughtful, should I be able to bear the thought of parting from you? Take care—pray take care. You are running into this gentleman's boat. Push off—push off. Ah! ah! thank you, Mr. Raban. Look, there is John Morgan. I wish he were here to steer us."

"Don't be frightened, dear," said Dolly, still holding her mother's hand, as the little rocking-boat made

towards the steps, where John Morgan was standing welcoming them all with as much heartiness as if they were returning from some distant journey, and had not met for years. Some people reserve themselves for great occasions, instead of spending their sympathies lavishly along the way. Good old John certainly never spared either sympathy or the expression of his hearty good-will. I don't know that the people, who sometimes smiled at his honest exuberances, found that he was less reliable when greater need arose, because he had been kind day after day about nothing at all. He saved Mrs. Palmer from a ducking on this occasion, as she precipitately flung herself out of the boat on to his toes. Frank Raban also jumped on shore. Robert said he would take the *Sarah Anne* back to her home in the boat-house.

"Then I suppose Dolly will have to go too," said Mrs. Palmer, archly; and Dolly, with a blush and a smile, settled herself once more comfortably on the low cushioned seat. She looked after her mother trailing up the slope, leaning on the curate's arm, and waving farewells until they passed by the garden-gate of the inn. Frank Raban was slowly following them. Then Dolly and Robert were alone, and out on the river again. The lightened boat swayed on the water. The air seemed to freshen, the ripples flowed in from a distance, the banks slid by. Robert smiled as he bent over the sculls. How often Dolly remembered the last golden hour that came to her that day before the lights had died away out of her sky, before the

waters had risen, before her boat was wrecked, and Robert far away out of the reach of her voice!

There were many other people coming back to the boat-house. The men were busy, the landing was crowded, and the *Sarah Anne* had to wait her turn. Robert disliked waiting extremely. He also disliked the looks of open admiration which two canoes were casting at the *Sarah Anne*.

"There are some big stones by the shore, Dolly," said Robert. "Do you think you could manage to land?"

"Of course I can," said active Dolly; "and then you can tie the boat to that green stake just beyond them." As she stood up to spring on shore, she looked round once more. Did some instinct tell her that this was the end of it all, and the last of the happy hours? She jumped with steady feet on to the wet stone, and stood balancing herself for a moment. The water rippled to her feet as she stood, with both hands outstretched, and her white dress fluttering, and all the light of youth and happiness in her radiant face. And then with another spring she was on land.

"Well done!" said one of the canoes. Robert turned round with a fierce look.

When he rejoined Dolly, he found her looking about in some distress.

"My ring, my pretty ring, Robert," she said, "I have dropped it." It was a ring he had given her the

day before. Dolly had at last consented to wear one, but this was large for her finger.

"You careless girl," said Robert; "here are your gloves and your handkerchief. Do you know what that ring cost?"

"Oh, don't tell me," said Dolly; "something dreadful, I know." And she stood penitently watching Robert scrambling back into the boat, and overthrowing and thumping the cushions. And yet, as she stood there, it came into her mind how many treasures were hers just then, and that of them all a ring was that which she could best bear to lose.

One of the canoes had come close into shore by this time, and the young man, who was paddling with his two spades, called out, saying, "Are you looking for anything? Is it for this?" and carefully putting his hand into the water he pulled out something shining. The ring had dropped off Dolly's finger as she jumped, and was lying on a stone that was half in and half out of the water, and near to the big one upon which she had been standing.

"How very fortunate!" exclaimed Henley from the boat.

Miss Vanborough was pleased to get back her pretty trinket, and thanked the young man with a very becoming blush.

"It is a very handsome coral," Robert said; "it would have been a great pity to lose it. We must have it made smaller, Dora. It must not come off again."

Dolly was turning it round thoughtfully and looking at the Medusa head carved and set in gold.

"Robert," she said once more, "does happiness never frighten you?"

"Never," said Henley, smiling, as she looked up earnestly into his face.

The old town at Kingston, with its many corners and gables, has something of the look of a foreign city heaped upon the river-side. The garden of the old inn runs down with terraces to the water. A side-door leads to the boat-houses. By daylight this garden is somewhat mouldy; but spiders' webs do not obtrude on summer evenings, and the Londoners who have come out of town for a breath of fresh air, stroll along the terraces, and watch the stream as it flows, unconscious of their serenity. They come here of summer evenings, and sit out in the little arbours, or walk along the terraces and watch the boats drift with the stream. If they look to the opposite banks they may see the cattle rearing their horned heads upon the sunset, and the distant chestnut groves and galleries of Hampton Court at the bend of the river.

Near the corner of one of these terraces, a little green weather-cocked summer-house stands boldly facing the regattas in their season, and beyond it again are a steep bank and some steps to a second terrace, from whence there is the side-door leading to the boats.

On this particular evening Frank Raban came

quietly zigzagging along these terraces, perhaps with some vague hope of meeting Dorothea on her return.

There are some years of one's life when one is less alive than at others, as there are different degrees of strength and power to live in the course of the same existence. Frank was not in the despairing state in which we first knew him, but he was not yet as other people are, and in hours of depression such as this, he was used to feel lonely and apart. He was used to see other people happy, anxious, busy, hurrying after one another, and he would look on as now, with his hands in his pockets, not indifferent, but feeling as if Fate had put him down solitary and silent, into the world—a dumb note (so he used to think) in the great music. And yet he knew that the music was there—that mighty human vibration which exists independent of all the dumb notes, cracked instruments, rifted lutes, and broken lyres of which we hear so much, and he had but to open his ears to it.

Two voices, anything but dumb, were talking inside the little summer-house. Raban had scarcely noticed them as he came along, listening with the vaguest curiosity, as people do, to reproaches and emotions which do not concern them; but presently, as he approached the summer-house, a tone struck him familiarly, and at the same instant he saw a dark figure rush wildly from the little wooden house, and leap right over the side of the terrace on to the path below; and then Frank recognised the frantic action

—it could only be George. A moment afterwards a woman—he knew her too—came out of the summer-house and stood for an instant panting against the doorway, leaning with her two hands against the lintel. She looked pale, troubled; her hair was pushed back from her white face; her eyes looked dark, beautiful. Never before had Raban seen Rhoda (for it was Rhoda) so moved. When she saw him a faint flush came into her cheeks. She came forward a few steps, then she stopped short again.

She was dragging her silk mantle, which had fallen off. One end was trailing after her along the gravel.

"Mr. Raban, is that you?" she said, in an agitated way. "Why did you come? Is it—is it nearly time to go? Is Mrs. Palmer come back? Oh, *please* take me to her!" And then she suddenly burst into tears, and the long black silk mantle fell to the ground as she put out two fluttering hands.

Raban had flung his cigar over the terrace after George.

"What is it?" he said, anxiously. "Can I help you in any way? What has happened?"

The young man spoke kindly, but in his usual matter-of-fact voice; and Rhoda, even in her distress, wondered at his coldness. No one before ever responded so calmly to whom she had appealed.

"Oh, you don't know," she said; "I can't tell you." And the poor little hands went up again with a desperate gesture.

Raban was very much touched; but, as I have said, he had little power of showing his sympathy, and, foolish fellow, doing unto others as he would be done by; he only said, "I have guessed something before now, Miss Parnell. I wish I could help you, with all my heart. Does not Miss Vanborough know of this? Cannot *she* advise? . . ."

Rhoda was in no mood to hear her friend's praises just then.

"Dolly," cried Rhoda, passionately, "she would have every one sacrificed to George. I *would* love him if I could," she said, piteously, "but how *can* I? he frightens me and raves at me; how can I love him? Oh! Mr. Raban, tell me that it is not wrong to feel thus?" And once more the fluttering hands went up, and the dark wistful eyes gazed childishly, piteously into his face. Rhoda was looking to Frank for the help that should have come to her from her own heart; she dimly felt that she must win him over, that if he would he could help her.

Rhoda pitied herself sincerely, she sobbed out her history to Frank with many tears. "How can I tell them all?" she said; "it will only make wretchedness, and now it is only I who am unhappy."

Was it only Rhoda who was unhappy? George, flying along the garden half distracted, aching, repentant, might have told another story. She had sent him away. He would do nothing that she wished, she said, he would not accept the independence that Lady Sarah had offered him, Rhoda did not believe

in his love, she only wanted him to go, to leave her. Yes, she meant it. And poor George had rushed away frantic and indignant. He did not care where he went. He had some vague idea that he would get a boat and row away for ever, but as he was hurrying headlong towards the boat-house he saw Dorothea and Robert coming arm-in-arm up the little path, and he turned and hurried back towards the inn. Dolly called to him, but he did not answer. Rhoda had sent him away, poor Dolly could not call him back. Robert shrugged his shoulders.

"Why do you do that?" said Dolly, annoyed; "he looked quite ill."

CHAPTER II.

A BOAT UPON THE WATER.

Ich stand gelehnet an den Mast,
Und zählte jede Welle.
Ade! mein schönes Vaterland,
Mein Schiff, das segelt schnelle!

Ich kam schon Liebchen's Haus vorbei,
Die Fensterscheiben blinken;
Ich guck' mir fast die Augen aus,
Doch will mir Niemand winken.

Ihr Thränen bleibt mir aus dem Aug,
Dass ich nicht dunkel sehe.
Mein krankes Herz, brich mir nicht
Vor allzugrossem Wehe!

HEINE.

GEORGE was shivering and sick at heart; the avenue led to a door that opened into the bar of the hotel, and George went in and called for some brandy. The spirits seemed to do him good; no one seeing a clumsy young fellow in a boating dress tossing off one glassful of brandy after another would have guessed at all the grief and passion that were tearing at his poor foolish heart. Rhoda had sent him away. Had he deserved this? Could not she read the truth? Poor timid faithless little thing. Why had he been so fierce to her, why had he told her he was jealous? George had a curious quickness of divination about others, although he was blind about his own concerns. He had reproached Rhoda because

she had been talking to Frank, but he knew well enough that Frank did not care for Rhoda. Poor child, did she know how it hurt him when she shrank from him and seemed afraid? Ah! she would not have been so cruel if she had known all. Thinking of it all he felt as if he had had some little bird in his rough grasp, frightened it, and hurt its wings. Then he suddenly said to himself that he would go back and find his poor frightened bird and stroke it and soothe it, ask it to forgive him. And then he left the place, and as hastily as he had entered; there was a last glass of brandy untasted on the counter, and he hurried back towards the terrace. He passed the window of the room where Mrs. Palmer was ordering tea from the sofa. Dolly, who had just come in, saw him pass by; she did not like his looks, and ran out after him, although both Robert and her mother called her back. George did not see her this time; he flew past the family groups sitting out in the warm twilight; he came to the terrace where he had been a few minutes before, and where the two were still standing—Raban, of whom he had said he was jealous, Rhoda, whom he loved—the two were slowly advancing, Frank's square shoulders dark against the light and Rhoda's slight figure bending forward; she was talking to Raban as she had so often talked to George himself, with that language of earnest eyes, tremulous tones, shrinking movements—how well he knew it all. What was she saying? Was she appealing to Frank to protect her from his love and despair, from the grief that she

had done her best to bring about? Rhoda laid her hand upon Raban's arm in her agitation.

It maddened George beyond bearing, and he stamped his heavy foot upon the gravel. Some people passing up from the boats stared at him, but went on their way; and Frank, looking up, saw George coming up swinging his angry arms; his eyes were fierce, his hat was pushed aside. He put Rhoda aside very gently, and took a step forward between her and George, who stood for a minute looking from one to another, as if he did not understand, and then he suddenly burst out, with a fierce oath: "Who told you to put yourself in my way?" And, as he spoke, he struck a heavy blow straight at Raban, who had barely time to parry it with his arm.

It was an instant's anger—one of those fatal minutes that undo days and months and years that have gone before; and that blow of George's struck Rhoda's feeble little fancy for him dead on the spot, as she gave a shrill cry of "For shame!" and sprang forward, and would have clung to Raban's arm. That blow ached for many and many a day in poor Dorothea's heart, for she saw it all from a turn of the path. As for Frank, he recovered himself in an instant.

"Go back, George," he said; "I will speak to you presently."

He did not speak angrily. His voice and the steady look of his resolute eyes seemed to sober the

poor reprobate. Not so Rhoda's cry of, "Go, yes go, for shame!"

"Go! What is it to you if I go or stay? Am I in your way?" shouts George. "Have you promised to marry him too? Have you tortured him too, and driven him half mad, and then—and then —— Oh, Rhoda, do you really wish me gone?" he cried, breaking down.

There was a tone in his voice that touched Raban, for whom the cry was not intended. Nothing would have melted Rhoda just then. She was angry beyond all power of expression. She wanted him gone, she wanted him silent; she felt as if she hated him.

"You are not yourself; you are not speaking the truth," said the girl, in a hard voice, drawing herself up. Then, as she spoke, all the brandy and all the fury seemed to mount once more into George's head.

"I am myself, and that is why I leave you," he shouts; "you are heartless: you have neither love nor charity in you, and now I leave you. Do you hear me?" he cried, getting louder and louder.

Any one could hear. Dolly could hear as she came hurrying up from the end of the terrace to the spot where her poor boy stood shouting out his heart's secret to unwilling ears. More than one person had stopped to listen to the angry voice. The placid stillness of the evening seemed to carry its echo along the dusky garden bowers, out upon the water flowing down below. Some boatmen had stopped to listen;

one or two people were coming up through the twilight.

"He is not sober," said Rhoda to Dolly. She spoke with a sort of cold disgust.

Dolly hardly heard her at the time. All she saw then was her poor George, with his red angry face—Frank trying to pacify him. Should she ever forget the miserable scene? For long years after it used to rise before her; she used to dream of it at night—of the garden, the river, the figures advancing in the dark.

Dolly ran up to her brother, and instinctively put out her arms as if to shield him from every one.

"Come, dear; come with me," she said flurriedly; "don't let them see you like this."

"It would shock their elegant susceptibilities," cries the irrepressible George; "it don't shock them to see a woman playing fast-and-loose with a poor wretch who would have given his life for her—yes, his life, and his love, and his heart's blood!"

Dolly had got her arms tight round George by this time. She had a shrinking dread of Henley seeing him so—he might be coming, she thought.

"Robert might see you. Oh, George, please come," she whispered, still clinging to him; and suddenly, to Dolly's surprise, George collapsed, with a sigh. His furious fit was over, and he let his sister lead him where she would.

"Go down by the river-side," said Raban, coming after them; "there are too many people the other

way." He spoke in a grave, anxious tone, and as the brother and sister went their way, he looked after them for a moment. Dolly had got her arm fast linked in George's. The young man was walking listlessly by her side. They neither of them looked back; they went down the steps and disappeared.

The place was all deserted by this time; the disturbance being over, the boatmen had gone on their way. The two went and sat down upon a log which had been left lying near the water-side; they were silent; they could see each other's faces, but little more. He sat crouching over with his chin resting on his hands. Dolly was full of compassion, and longing to comfort; but how could she comfort? Such pain as his was not to be eased by words spoken by another person. When George began to speak at last, his voice sounded so sad and so jarred from its usual sweetness that Dorothea was frightened, as if she could hear in it the echo of a coming trouble.

"I wanted that woman to love me," he said. "Dolly, you don't know how I loved her." He was staring at the stream with his starting eyes, and biting his nails. "We have no luck, either of us," he said; "I don't deserve any, but you do. Tell Frank I'm sorry I struck him; she had made me half mad; she looks at me with those great eyes of hers, and says, 'Go!' and she makes me mad: she does it to them all. . . . But now I have left her! left her! left her!" repeated ugly George, with a sort of sob. "What does she care?" and he got up and shook himself, as

a big dog might have done, and went out a step into the twilight, and then came back.

"Thank you, old Dolly, for your goodness," he said, standing before her. "I can't face them all again, and Robert with his confounded supercilious airs. I beg your pardon, Dolly; don't look angry. I see how good you are, and I see," he said, staring her full in the face, "that we have been both running our heads against a wall."

He walked on a little way, and Dolly followed. She could not answer him just then. She felt with a pang that George and Robert would never be friends; that she must love them apart; even in heart she must keep them asunder.

They had come to the place where not an hour ago she had jumped ashore. The boat was still there, as they had left it—tied to the stake. The boatmen were at supper, and had not yet taken it in. "What are you doing?" said Dolly, as George stopped, and began to untie the rope; "George, be careful."

"The fresh air will do me good," he said; "don't be afraid; I'll take care, if you wish it;" then he nodded, and got into the boat, where the sculls were lying, and he began to shove off with a rattle of the keel upon the shore. "I will leave the boat at Teddington," he said, "and walk home. Good-night! good-by!" he said. A boatman hearing the voices, came out of the boat-house close by, and while Dolly was explaining, the boat started off with a dull plash of oars falling upon dark waters. George was rowing

very slowly, his head was turned towards the garden of the inn. There were lights in the windows, and figures coming and going; the water swirled against the wall of the terrace; the scent of the rhododendrons seemed to fill the air and to stifle him as he passed; a bird chirped from the darkness of some overhanging bushes. He could hear his mother's voice: "Robert! it is getting late; why don't they come in to tea? I must say it is nasty stuff, and not to compare to that delicious Rangoon flavour." He paused for a moment; her voice died away, and then all was silent. The evening was growing chill; some mists were rising. George felt the cool damp wind against his hot brow as he rowed doggedly on—past the lights of the windows of the inn, past the town, under the darkness of the bridge.

He left them all behind, and his life and his love, he thought, and his mad passion; and himself, and Dolly, and Rhoda, and all the hopeless love he longed for and that was never to be his. There were other things in life. So he rowed away into the darkness with mixed anger and peace in his heart. What would Rhoda say when she heard he was gone? Nothing much! He knew her well enough to know that Dolly would understand, but her new ties would part them more entirely than absence or silence.

There is a song of Schubert's I once heard a great singer sing. As she sang, the dull grey river flowed through the room, the bright lamp-lit walls opened out, the mists of a closing darkness surrounded us,

the monotonous beat of the rowlocks kept time to the music, and the man rowed away, and silence fell upon the waters.

So Dolly stood watching the boat as it disappeared along the dark wall; for a time she thought she heard the plash of the oars out upon the water, and a dark shade gliding away past the wharves, and the houses that crowd down to the shore.

She was saying her prayers for her poor boy as she walked back slowly to join the others. Robert met her with a little remonstrance for having hidden away so long. She took his arm and clung to it for a minute, trembling, with her heart beating. "Oh! Robert; you won't let things come between us?" said the girl greatly moved; "my poor George is so unhappy. He is to blame, but Rhoda has been hard upon him. Have you guessed it all?" "My dear Dolly," said Robert, gravely, "Rhoda has told us everything. She is most justly annoyed. She is quite overcome. She has just gone home with her uncle, and I must say. . . ." "Don't, don't say anything," said Dolly, passionately bursting into tears, and her heart went out after her poor George rowing away along the dark river.

CHAPTER III.

TRUST ME.

How tired we feel, my heart and I!

E. B. Browning.

The much-talked-of tea was standing, black as the waters of oblivion, in the teapot when they rejoined Mrs. Palmer. Philippa was sitting tête-à-tête with Raban, and seemed chiefly perturbed at having been kept waiting, and because John Morgan had carried off Rhoda.

"I can't think why he did it," said Mrs. Palmer, crossly; "it is much pleasanter all keeping together, and it is too silly of that little Rhoda to make such a disturbance. As if George would have said anything to annoy her with all of us present. Tell me, what did really happen, Robert? Why was I not sent for?"

"I am afraid George was a good deal to blame," said Robert, in a confidential voice. "I only came up after the fracas, but, from what I hear, I am afraid he had been drinking at the bar. Dolly can tell you more than I can, for she was present from the beginning."

Dolly was silent: she could not speak. Frank looked at her and saw her blush painfully. He was

glad that Miss Vanborough should be spared any farther explication, and that Mrs. Palmer beckoned him into a window to tell him that the Admiral had the greatest horror of intemperance, and that she remembered a fearful scene with a kitmutghar who had drained off a bottle of her eau-de-Cologne. "Dear George, unfortunately, was of an excitable disposition. As for the poor Admiral, he is perfectly ungovernable when he is roused," said Mrs. Palmer, in her heroic manner. "I have seen strong men like yourself, Mr. Raban, turn pale before him. I remember a sub-lieutenant trembling like an aspen leaf: he had neglected to call my carriage. Is it not time to be off? Dolly, what have I done with my little blue shawl? You say George is *not* coming?"

"Here is your little blue shawl, mamma," said Dolly, wearily. She was utterly dispirited: she could not understand her mother's indifference, nor Robert's even flow of conversation: she forgot that they did not either of them realise how serious matters had been.

"It is really too naughty of George," was all that Mrs. Palmer said; "and, now that I think of it, he certainly told me he might have to go back to Cambridge to-night, so we may not see him again. Mr. Raban, if you see him, tell him—— But, I forgot," with a gracious smile, "we meet you to-morrow at the Middletons'. Robert tells me my brother and his family are come to town this week. It will be but a painful meeting I fear. Dolly, remind me to call there in the morning. They have taken a house in Dean's Yard, of all

places. And there is Madame Frisette at nine. How tiresome those dressmakers are."

"Is Madame Frisette at work for Dorothea?" asked Robert, with some interest.

Dolly did not reply, nor did she seem to care whether Madame Frisette was at work or not. She sat leaning back in her corner, with two hands lying listless in her lap, pale through the twilight. Frank Raban, as he looked at her, seemed to know, almost as if she had told him in words, what was passing in her mind. His jealous intuition made him understand it all; he knew too, as well as if Robert had spoken, something of what he was *not* feeling. They went rolling on through the dusk, between villas and dim hedges and nursery-gardens, beyond which the evening shadows were passing; and all along the way it seemed to Dolly that she could hear George's despairing voice ringing beyond the mist, and, haunted by this echo, she could scarcely listen with any patience to her companion's ripple of small talk, to Mrs. Palmer's anecdotes of Captains and Colonels and anticipation of coming gaiety and emotions. What a season was before her! The Admiral's return, Dolly's marriage, Lady Henley's wearing insinuations—she dreaded to think of it all.

"You must call for us to-morrow at half-past seven, Robert, and take us to the Middletons'. I couldn't walk into the room alone with Dolly. I suppose Joanna, too, will be giving some at-homes. I shall have to go, however little inclined I may feel."

"It is always well to do what other people do," said Robert; "it answers much best in the long run."

He did not see Dolly's wondering look. Was this the life Dolly had dreamt of? a sort of wheel of commonplace to which poor unquiet souls were to be bound, confined by platitudes, and innumerable threads, and restrictions, and silences. She had sometimes dreamt of something more meaningful and truer, something responding to her own nature, a life coming straighter from the heart. She had not counted much on happiness. Perhaps she had been too happy to wish for happiness; but to-night it occurred to her again what life might be—a life with a truth in it and a genuine response and a nobler scheme than any she had hitherto realised.

Frank heard a sigh coming from her corner. They were approaching the street where he wanted to be set down, and he, too, had something in his mind, which he felt he must say before they parted. As he wished Dorothea good-night he found a moment to say, in a low voice, "I hope you may be able to tell Lady Sarah everything that has happened, without reserve. Do trust me. It will be best for all your sakes;" and then he was gone before Dolly could answer.

"What did he say?" said Robert Henley. "Are you warm enough, Dolly? Will you have a shawl?"

He spoke so affectionately that she began to wonder whether it was because they were not alone that he had been cold and disappointing.

They reached the house, and old Sam came to the

door, and Robert helped to unpack the wrecks of the day's pleasures—the hampers, and umbrellas, and arm-fuls of crumpled muslins. Then the opportunity came for Robert to be impulsive if he chose, for Mrs. Palmer floated upstairs with her candle to say good-night to Lady Sarah. She was kissing her hand over the banisters, and dropping all the wax as she went along.

Robert came up to Dolly, who was standing in the hall. "Good-night," he said. "It might have been a pleasant day upon the whole if it had not been for George. You must get him to apologise to Rhoda, Dora. I mean to speak very plainly to him when I see him next."

His calmness exasperated her as he stood there with his handsome face looking down a little reproachfully at her flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes.

"Speaking won't do a bit of good, Robert," she said, hastily. "Pray don't say much to him——"

"I wonder when you will learn to trust me, Dora," said her cousin taking her hand. "How shall we ever get on unless you do?"

"I am sure I don't know," Dolly answered, wearily; "we don't seem to want the same things, Robert, or to be going together a bit."

"What do you mean?" said Henley. "You are tired and out of spirits to-night."

With a sudden reaction Dolly caught hold of his arm, with both hands. "Robert! Robert! Robert!" she said, holding him fast and looking as if she could transform him with her eyes to be what she wanted.

"Silly child," he answered, "I don't think you yourself know what you want. Good-night. Don't forget to be ready in time to-morrow."

Then he was gone, having first looked for his umbrella, and the door banged upon Robert and the misty stars, and Dolly remained standing at the foot of the stairs. Frank Raban's words had borne fruit as sensible words should do. "Trust me," he had said; and Henley had used the same phrase, only with Robert "Trust me" meant believe that I cannot be mistaken; with Frank "Trust me" meant trust in truth in yourself and in others. Dolly, with one of those quick impulses which come to impressionable people, suddenly felt that he was right. All along she had been mistaken. It would have been better, far better, from the beginning, to have told Lady Sarah everything. She had been blinded, over-persuaded. Marker came up to shut bolts and put out the lights. Dolly looked up, and she went and laid her tired head on the old nurse's shoulder, and clung to her for an instant.

"Is anything the matter, my dearie?" said Marker.

"Nothing new," Dolly said. "Marker, George is not come home. I have so much to say to him! Don't bolt the door, and please leave a light."

But George did not come home that night, although the door was left unbolted and the light kept burning on purpose. When the morning came his bed was folded smooth, and everything looked straight and silent in his room, which was orderly as places are when the people are away who inhabit them.

CHAPTER IV.

CIRCUMSTANCE.

The largest minds, still earthward bent, are small,
Who, knowing much, are ignorant of all.

HAMILTON AÏDÉ.

FOR some days before the picnic Mrs. Palmer and Julie had been absorbed in the preparation of two beautiful garments that were to be worn at Mrs. Middleton's dinner, and at a ball at Bucklersbury House, for which Mrs. Palmer was expecting an invitation. Lady Sarah had written at her request to ask for one. Meanwhile the dresses had been growing under Julie's art; throwing out fresh flounces and trimmings, and ribbons, hour by hour, until they had finally come to perfection, and were now lying side by side on the bed in the spare room, ready to be tried on for the last time.

"Must it be *now*, mamma?" said Dolly. "Breakfast is just ready, and Aunt Sarah will be waiting."

"Julie, go downstairs and beg Lady Sarah not to wait," said Mrs. Palmer, with great decision.

Julie came back, saying that Miss Rhoda was with Lady Sarah below, and asking for Miss Dolly.

"Presently," said Mrs. Palmer. "Very pretty, indeed, Julie!" Then she suddenly exclaimed, "You cannot imagine what it is, Dolly, to be linked to one so utterly uncongenial, you who are so fortunate in

our dear Robert's perfect sympathy and knowledge of London life. He quite agrees with me in my wish that you should be introduced. Admiral Palmer hates society, except to preach at it—such a pity, is it not! I assure you, strange as it may seem, I quite dread his return."

Dolly stood bolt upright, scarcely conscious of the dress or the pins, or her mother's monologue. She was still thinking over the great determination she had come to. George had not come back, but Dolly had made up her mind to tell Lady Sarah everything. She was not afraid; it was a relief to have the matter settled. She would say no word to injure him. It was she who had been to blame throughout. Her reflections were oddly intermingled with snips and pricks other than those of her conscience. Once, as Julie ran a pin into her arm, she thought how strange it was that Mr. Raban should have guessed everything all along. Dolly longed and feared to have her explanation over.

"Have you nearly done? Let me go down, Julie," said Dolly, becoming impatient at last.

But Julie still wanted to do something to the set of the sleeve.

And while Julie was pinning poor Dolly down, the clock struck nine, and the time was over, and Dolly's opportunity was lost for ever. It has happened to us all. When she opened the dining-room door at last she knew in one instant that it was too late.

The room seemed full of people. Lady Sarah

was there; Mrs. Morgan bristling by the window; Rhoda was there, kneeling at Lady Sarah's knee, in some agitation: her bonnet had fallen off, her hair was all curling and rough. She started up as Dolly came in, and ran to meet her.

"Oh! Dolly," she said, "come, come," and she seized both her hands. "I have told Lady Sarah everything; she knows all. Oh! why did we not confide in her long ago?" and Rhoda burst into tears. "Oh, I feel how wrong we have been," she sobbed.

"Rhoda has told me everything, Dolly," said Lady Sarah, in a cold voice—"everything that those whom I trusted implicitly saw fit to conceal from me."

Was it Aunt Sarah who had spoken in that cold harsh-sounding tone?

"Rhoda has acted by my advice, and with my full approval," said Mrs. Morgan, stepping forward. "She is not one to look back once her hand is to the plough. When I had seen George's letter—it was lying on the table—I said at once that no time should be lost in acquainting your aunt, Dolly. It is inconceivable to me that you have not done so before. We started immediately after our eight-o'clock breakfast, and all is now clearly understood, I trust, Lady Sarah; Rhoda's frankness will be a lesson to Dolly."

Poor Dolly! she was stiff, silent, overwhelmed. She looked appealingly at her aunt, but Lady Sarah looked away. What could she say? how was it that she was there a culprit while Rhoda stood weeping and forgiven? Rhoda who had enforced the silence,

Rhoda now taking merit for her tardy frankness! while George was gone; and Dolly in disgrace.

"Indeed, Aunt Sarah, I would have told you everything," cried the girl, very much agitated, "only Rhoda herself made me promise——"

"Dolly! you never promised," cried Rhoda. "But we were all wrong," she burst out with fresh penitence; "only, Lady Sarah knows all, and we shall be happier now," she said, wiping her eyes.

"Happy in right-doing," interrupted Mrs. Morgan.

"Have we done wrong, Aunt Sarah? Forgive us," said Dolly, with a touching ring in her voice.

Lady Sarah did not answer. She was used to her nephew's misdeeds, but that Dolly—her own Dolly—should have been the one to plot against her cut the poor lady to the heart. She could not speak. "And Dolly knew it all the time," she had said to Rhoda a minute before Dolly came in. "Yes, she knew it," said Rhoda. "She wished it, and feared——" Here Rhoda blushed very red. "George told me she feared that you might not approve and do for him as you might otherwise have done. Oh! Lady Sarah, what injustice we have done you!"

"Perhaps Dolly would wish to see the letter," said Mrs. Morgan, offering her a paper; there was no mistaking the cramped writing. There was no date nor beginning to the note:—

I have been awake all night thinking over what has happened. It is not your fault that you do not know what love is, nor what a treasure I have wasted upon you. I have given you my best, and to you it is worthless.

You can't realise such love as mine. You will not even understand the words that I am writing to you: but it is not your fault, any more than it is mine, that I cannot help loving you. Oh, Rhoda, you don't care so much for my whole life's salvation as I do for one moment's peace of mind for you. I see it now—I understand all now. Forgive me if I am hurting you, for the sake of all you have made me suffer. I feel as if I could no longer bear my life here. I must go, and yet I must see you once more. You need not be afraid that I should say anything to frighten or distress you. Your terror of me has pained me far more than you have any conception of. God bless you. I had rather your hands smote me than that another blessed.

"It is most deplorable that a young man of George's ability should write such nonsense," said Mrs. Morgan.

Poor Dolly flushed up and began to tremble. Her heart ached for her poor George's trouble.

"It is not nonsense," she said, passionately; "people call what they cannot feel themselves nonsense. Aunt Sarah, you understand, though they don't. You must see how unhappy he is. How can Rhoda turn against him now? How can she after all that has passed? What harm has he done? It was not wicked to love her more than she loved him."

"Do you see no cruelty in all this long deception?" said Lady Sarah, with two red spots burning in her cheeks. "You must both have had some motive for your silence. Have I ever shown myself cold or unfeeling to you?" and the flushed face was turned away from her.

"It was not for herself, Lady Sarah," said Mrs. Morgan, wishing to see justice done. "No doubt she did not wish to injure George's prospects."

Dolly was silent. She had some dim feeling of what was in Lady Sarah's mind; but it was a thought

she put aside—it seemed unworthy of them both. She was ashamed to put words to it.

If Dolly and her aunt had only been alone all might have been well, and the girl might have made Lady Sarah understand how true she had been to her and loyal at heart, although silent from circumstances. Dolly looked up with wistful speaking eyes, and Lady Sarah almost understood their mute entreaty.

The words of love are all but spoken when some one else speaks other words; the hands long to grasp each other, and other fingers force them asunder. Alas! Rhoda stood weeping between them, and Mrs. Palmer now appeared in an elegant morning wrapper.

"My dearest child, Madame Frisette is come and is waiting," said Dolly's mamma, sinking into a chair. "She is a delightful person, but utterly reckless for trimmings. How do you do, Mrs. Morgan; why do you not persuade Lady Sarah to let Madame Frisette take her pattern, and——?"

But, as usual, Lady Sarah, freezing under Mrs. Palmer's sunny influence, got up and left the room.

Rhoda, tearful and forgiven, remained for some time giving her version of things to Mrs. Palmer. She had come to speak to Lady Sarah by her aunt's advice. Aunt Morgan had opened George's letter as it lay upon the breakfast-table, and had been as much surprised as Rhoda herself by its contents. They had come to talk things over with Lady Sarah, to tell her of all that had been making Rhoda so unhappy of late.

"I thought she and you, Mrs. Palmer, would have advised me and told me what was right to do," said the girl, with dark eyes brimming over. "How can I help it if he loves me? I know that he might have looked higher."

"The boy is perfectly demented," said Mrs. Palmer, "to dream of marrying. He has not a sixpence, my dear child—barely enough to pay his cab-hire. He has been most ridiculous. How we shall ever persuade Lady Sarah to pay his debts I cannot imagine! Dolly will not own to it, but we all know that she does not like parting with her money. I do hope and trust she has made her will, for she looks a perfect wreck."

"Oh, mamma!" entreated poor Dolly.

Mrs. Palmer paid no heed, except to say crossly, "I do wish you had shown a little common sense. Dolly, you have utterly injured your prospects. Robert will be greatly annoyed; he counts so much upon dear Sarah's affection for you both. As for me, I have been disappointed far too often to count upon anything. By the way, Dolly, I wish you would go up and ask your aunt whether that invitation has come to Bucklersbury House. Go, child; why do you look so vacant?"

Poor Dolly! One by one all those she trusted most seemed to be failing and disappointing her. Hitherto Dolly had idealised them all. She shrank to learn that love and faith must overcome evil with good, and that this is their reward even in this life,

and that to love those who love you is not the whole of its experience.

Rhoda's letter, miserable as it was, had relieved Dolly from much of her present anxiety about George. That hateful dark river no longer haunted her. He was unhappy, but he was safe on shore. All the same, everything seemed dull, and sad, and undefined that afternoon, and Robert coming in, found her sitting in the oak-room window with her head resting on her hand and her work lying in her lap. She had taken up some work, but as she set the stitches, it seemed to her,—it was but a fancy—that with each stitch George was going farther and farther away, and she dropped her work at last into her lap, and reasoned herself into some composure; only when her lover came in cheerfully and talking with the utmost ease and fluency, her courage failed her suddenly.

"What is the matter; why do you look so unhappy?" said Robert.

"Nothing is the matter," said Dolly, "only most things seem going wrong, Robert; and I have been wrong, and there is nothing to be done."

"What is the use of making yourself miserable?" said Robert, good-naturedly scolding her; "you are a great deal too apt, Dolly, to trouble yourself unnecessarily. You must forgive me for saying so. This business between George and Rhoda is simply childish, and there is nothing in it to distress you."

"Do you think that nothing is unhappiness," said

Dolly, going on with her own thought, "unless it has a name and a definite shape?"

"I really don't know," said Henley. "It depends upon . . . What is this invitation, Dora? You don't mean to say the Duchess has not sent one yet?" he said in a much more interested voice.

"There is only the card for Aunt Sarah. I am afraid mamma is vexed, and it is settled that I am not to go."

"Not to go?" Robert cried; "my dear Dolly, of course you must go; it is absolutely necessary you should be seen at one or two good houses, after all the second-rate society you have been frequenting lately. Where is your mother?"

When Mrs. Palmer came in, in her bonnet, languid and evidently out of temper, and attended by Colonel Witherington, Robert immediately asked, in a heightened tone of voice, whether it was true that Dolly was not to be allowed to go to the ball.

Philippa replied in her gentlest accents that no girl should be seen without her mother. If an invitation came for them both, everything was ready; and, even at the last moment, she should be willing to take Dorothea to Bucklersbury House.

"Too bad," said the Colonel, sitting heavily down in Lady Sarah's chair. "A conspiracy, depend upon it. They don't wish for too much counter-attraction in a certain quarter."

"One never knows what to think," said Mrs. Palmer, thoughtfully; "I have left a card this afternoon, Robert,

upon which I wrote a few words in pencil, to explain my connection with Sarah. I wished to show that I at least was not unacquainted with the usages of civilised society. Kindly hand me that *Peerage*."

"My dear Aunt Philippa," cried Robert, walking up and down in a state of the greatest perturbation, "what induced you to do such a preposterous thing? What will the Duchess think of us all?"

Mrs. Palmer, greatly offended, replied that she could not allow Robert to speak to her in such disrespectful tones. The Duchess might think what she chose; Dolly should not go without her.

CHAPTER V.

WHITE ROSES.

If thou must love me, let it be for nought
Except for love's sake only.

Some one sent Dolly a great bunch of white roses that afternoon; they came in with a late breath of summer—shining white with dark leaves and stems—and, as Dolly bent her head over the soft zones, breathing their sweet breath, it seemed to carry her away into cool depths of fragrance. The roses seemed to come straight from some summer garden, from some tranquil place where all was peace and silence. As she stood, holding them in her two hands, the old garden at All Saints' came before her, and the day when Robert first told her that he loved her. How different things seemed already—the roses only were as sweet as she remembered them. Every one seemed changed since then—Robert himself most of all; and if she was herself disappointed, was she not as changed as the rest?

But these kind, dear roses had come to cheer her, and to remind her to be herself, of all that had gone before. How good of Robert to think of them! She wished they had come before he left, that she might have thanked him. She now remembered telling him,

as they were driving down to the river, that no roses were left in their garden.

"Very pretty," said her mother. "Take them away, Dolly; they are quite overpowering. You know, Colonel Witherington, how much better people understand these things at Trincomalee: and what quantities of flowers I used to receive there. Even the Admiral once ordered in six dozen lemon-shrubs in tubs for my fête. As for the people in this country, they don't do things by halves, but by quarters, my dear Colonel."

Mrs. Palmer was still agitated, nor did she regain her usual serenity until about six o'clock, when, in answer to a second note from Lady Sarah, the persecuted Duchess sent a blank card for Mrs. Palmer to fill up herself if she chose.

When Dolly came to say good-night to Lady Sarah she held her roses in her hand: some of the leaves shook down upon her full white skirts; it was late in the summer, and the sweet heads hung languid on their stalks. They were the last roses that Dolly wore for many and many a day.

"So you are going," said Lady Sarah.

"Yes," said Dolly, waiting for one word, one sign to show that she was forgiven: she stood with sun-gilt hair in the light of the western window. "Dear Aunt Sarah, you are not well. You must not be left all alone," she went on timidly.

"I am quite well—I shall not be alone," said Lady Sarah. "Mr. Tapeall is coming, and I am going to

sign my will, Dolly," and she looked her niece hard in the face. "I shall not change it again whatever may happen. You will have no need in future to conceal anything from me, for the money is yours." And Lady Sarah sighed, deeply hurt.

Dolly blushed up. "Dear Aunt Sarah, I do not want your money," she said. "You could never have thought——"

"I can only judge people by their deeds," said Lady Sarah, coldly still. "You and George shall judge me by mine, whether or not I have loved you;" and the poor old voice failed a little, and the lips quivered as she held up her cheek for Dolly to kiss.

"Dear, dearest," said Dolly, "only forgive me too. If you mean that you are going to leave me money, I shall not be grateful. I have enough. What do I want? Only that you should love us always. Do you think I would marry Robert if he did not think so too?"

"Mademoiselle! Madame is ready," cried Julie, coming to the door, and tapping.

"George, too, would say the same, you know he would," Dolly went on, unheeding Julie's call. "But if you give him what you meant for me, dear Aunt Sarah; indeed that would make me happiest, and then I should know you forgive me."

The door creaked, opened, and Mrs. Palmer stood there impatient in her evening dress.

"My dear Dolly, what have you got to say to Aunt

Sarah? We shall be dreadfully late, and Robert is fuming. *Do* pray come. Good-night, Sarah—so sorry to leave you."

Rather than keep dinner waiting people break off their talk, their loves, their prayers. The Middletons' dinner was waiting, and Dolly had to come away. Some of the rose-leaves were lying on the floor after she had left, and the caressing fragrance still seemed to linger in the room.

Dolly left home unforgiven, so she thought. Aunt Sarah had not smiled nor spoken to her in her old voice once since that wretched morning scene.

But, in truth, Lady Sarah was clearer-sighted than people gave her credit for; she was bitterly hurt by Dolly's want of confidence, but she began to understand the struggle which had been going on in the girl's mind, and so far, things were not so sad as she had imagined at first. They were dismal enough.

When Marker came to tell Lady Sarah that Mr. Tapeall and his clerks were below, she got up from her chair wearily, and went down to meet the lawyer. What did she care now? She had saved, and pinched, and laid by (more of late than any one suspected), and Dolly was to benefit, and Dolly did not care; Robert only seemed to count upon the money. It is often the most cautious people who betray themselves most unexpectedly. Something in Henley's manner had annoyed Lady Sarah of late. He had spoken of George with constant disparagement. More than once

Robert had let slip a word that showed how confidently he looked for Dolly's inheritance.

One day Mrs. Palmer had noticed Lady Sarah's eyes upon him, and immediately tried to cover his mistake. Not so Dolly, who said, "Robert! what are you thinking of? How should we ever be able to afford a country-house if you go into Parliament?"

"Robert thinks he is marrying an heiress, I suppose," said Lady Sarah.

"No, he doesn't," Dolly answered; "that would spoil it all."

This was all the gratitude poor Lady Sarah had saved and pinched herself to win.

Lady Sarah, as I have said, might have been a money-lover, if her warm heart had not saved her. But she was human, and she could not help guessing at Robert's comfortable calculations, and she resented them. Did she not know what it was to be married, not for herself, but for what she could bring? Was *that* to be her Dolly's fate? Never, never! Who knows? Let her have her own way; it may be best after all, thought Lady Sarah, wearily. She was tired of battling. Let George inherit, if it so pleased them. To please them was all she had wished or hoped for, and now even the satisfaction of pleasing them in her own way was denied her. But her girl was true; this she felt. No sordid thoughts had ever come between them, and for this she thanked God in her heart.

"You may burn it, Mr. Tapeall," said Lady Sarah, as the lawyer produced a beautiful neatly-written

parchment, where Miss Dorothea Vanborough's name was emblazoned many times. "I want you to make me another. Yes, make it directly, and I will sign it at once, and old Sam can bear witness."

"I shall be happy to receive any further instructions," said the lawyer; "I shall have to take the memorandum home with me to prepare——"

"I will sign the memorandum," said Lady Sarah. "You can have it copied, if you like, Mr. Tapeall; but I wish to have this business settled at once, and to hear no more of it. There is a pen and some ink on that table."

"Where did you get your roses?" said Robert to Dolly; "I thought you told me they were over."

"Did not you send them?" said Dolly, disappointed. "Who can have sent them? *Not* Colonel Witherington?"

"Mr. Raban is more likely," said Mrs. Palmer. "Julie tells me he came to the door this afternoon."

"How kind of him!" cried Miss Vanborough.

"It was quite unnecessary," said Robert. "Nobody, in society, carries bouquets now."

"Then I am not in society," said Dolly, laughing; but although she laughed, she felt sad and depressed.

When the door opened and Mrs. Palmer, followed by her beautiful daughter and Henley, came into the room at Mrs. Middleton's, Colonel Witherington declared, upon his honour, they quite brightened up the party. White and gracious with many laces and

twinklings, Mrs. Palmer advances, taking to society as a duck takes to the water, and not a little pleased with the sensation she is creating. Dolly follows, looking very handsome, but, it must be confessed, somewhat absent. Her mother had excellent taste, and had devised a most becoming costume, and if Dolly had only been herself she would certainly have done credit to it; but she had not responded to Mademoiselle Julie's efforts—a sudden fit of dull shyness seemed to overpower her. If Frank Raban had been there she would have liked to thank him for her flowers; but Mrs. Middleton began explaining to Robert how sorry she was that his friend Mr. Raban had been obliged to go off to Cambridge. Dolly was a little disappointed. The silvery folds of her dress fell each in juxtaposition; but Dolly sat silent and pale and far away, and for some time she scarcely spoke.

"That girl does not look happy," said some one.

Robert overheard the speech, and was very much annoyed by it. These constant depressions were becoming a serious annoyance to him. He took Dolly down to dinner, but he devoted himself to a sprightly lady on his left hand, who, with many shrieks of laughter and wrigglings and twinklings of diamonds, spurred him on to a brilliance foreign to his nature. Young as he was, Robert was old for his age, and a capital diner-out, and he had the art of accommodating himself to his audience. Mrs. Palmer was radiant sitting between two white neckcloths: one belonged to the Viscount Portcullis, the other to the faithful Wither-

ington; and she managed to talk to them both at once.

Dolly's right-hand neighbour was an upright, rather stern, soldierly-looking man, with a heavy white moustache. He spoke to her, and she answered with an effort, for her thoughts were still far away, and she was preoccupied still. Dolly was haunted by the sense of coming evil; she was pained by Robert's manner. He was still displeased, and he took care to show that it was so. She was troubled about George; she was wondering what he was about. She had written to him at Cambridge that afternoon a loving, tender, sisterly little letter, begging him to write to his faithful sister Dolly. Again she told herself that it was absurd to be anxious, and wicked to be cross, and she tried to shake off her depression, and to speak to the courteous though rather alarming neighbour on her right hand.

It was a dinner-party just like any other. They are pretty festivals on the whole, although we affect to decry them. In the midst of the Middleton dinner-table was an erection of ice and ferns and cool green grass, and round about this circled the entertainment —flowers, dried fruit, processions of cut glass and china, with entrées, diversities of chicken and cutlet, and then ladies and gentlemen alternate, with a host at one end and a hostess at the other, and an outermost ring of attendants, pouring out gold and crimson juices into the crystal cups.

It is fortunate, perhaps, that other people are not

silent always because we are sad. With all its objections—I have read this in some other book—there is a bracing atmosphere in society, a Spartan-like determination to leave cares at home, and to try to forget all the ills and woes and rubs to which we are subject, and to think only of the present and the neighbours fate has assigned for the time. Little by little, Dolly felt happier and more reassured. Where everything was so commonplace and unquestioning, it seemed as if tragedy could not exist. Comedy seems much more real at times than tragedy. Three or four tragedies befall us in the course of our existence, and a hundred daily comedies pass before our eyes.

Dolly, hearing her mother's silver laugh and Robert's cheerful duet, was reassured, and she entered little by little into the tune of the hour, and once, glancing up shyly, she caught a very kind look in her neighbour's keen dark eyes.

He knew nothing of her, except a sweet girlish voice and a blush; but that was enough almost, for it was Dolly's good fortune to have a voice and a face that told of her as she was. There are some smiles and blushes that mean nothing at all, neither happy emotion nor quick response; and, again, are there not other well-loved faces which are but the homely disguises in which angels have come into our tents? Dolly's looks pleased her neighbour, nor was he disappointed when he came to talk to her; he felt a kindness towards the girl, and a real interest when he discovered her name. He had known her father in

India many years before. "Had she ever heard of David Fane?" Colonel Fane seemed pleased when Dolly brightened up and exclaimed. He went on to tell her that he was on his way to the Crimea: his regiment was at Southampton, waiting its orders to sail.

"And you are going to that dreadful war!" said Dolly, in her girlish tones, after a few minutes' talk.

Colonel Fane looked very grave.

"Your father was a brave soldier," he said; "he would have told you that war is a cruel thing; but there are worse things than fighting for a good cause."

"You mean *not* fighting," said Dolly; "but how can we who sit at home in peace and safety be brave for others?"

"I have never yet known a woman desert her post in the time of danger," said Colonel Fane, speaking with gentle, old-fashioned courtesy. "You have your own perils to affront: they find you out even in your homes. I saw a regiment of soldiers to-day," he said, smiling, "in white caps and aprons, who fight with some very deadly enemies. They are under the command of my sister, my brother's widow. She is a hospital-nurse, and has charge of a fever-ward at present."

Then he went on to tell Dolly that his brother had died of small-pox not long before, and his wife had mourned him, not in sackcloth and ashes, but in pity and love and devotion to others. Dolly listened with an unconscious look of sympathy that touched Colonel Fane more than words.

"And is she quite alone now?" said Dolly.

"I should like you to know her some day," he said. "She is less alone than anybody I know. She lives near St. Barnabas' Hospital; and if you will go and see her sometime when she is at home and away from her sick, she will make, not acquaintance, but friends with you, I hope."

Then he asked Dolly whether she was an only child, and the girl told him something—far more than she had any idea of—about George.

"I might have been able to be of some little use to your brother if he had chosen the army for a profession," said Colonel Fane, guessing that something was amiss.

Dolly was surprised to find herself talking to Colonel Fane, as if she had known him all her life. A few minutes before he had been but a name. When he offered to help George, Dolly blushed up, and raised two grateful eyes.

There is something in life which is not love, but which plays as great a part almost—sympathy, quick response—I scarcely know what name to give it; at any moment, in the hour of need perhaps, a door opens, and some one comes into the room. It may be a common-place man in a shabby coat, a placid lady in a smart bonnet; does nothing tell us that this is one of the friends to be, whose hands are to help us over the stony places, whose kindly voices will sound to us hereafter voices out of the infinite. Life has, indeed, many phases, love has many a metempsychosis. Is it a lost love we are mourning—a lost

hope? Only dim, distant stars, we say, where all was light. Lo, friendship comes dawning in generous and peaceful streams!

Before dinner was over, Colonel Fane said to Dolly, "I hope to have another talk with you some day. I am not coming upstairs now; but, if you will let me do so, I shall ask my sister, Mrs. William Fane, to write to you when she is free."

Robert was pleased to see Dolly getting on so well with her neighbour. He was a man of some mark, and a most desirable acquaintance for her. Robert was just going to introduce himself, when Mrs. Middleton bowed to Lady Portcullis, and the ladies began to leave the room.

"Good-by," said Dolly's new friend, very kindly; "I shall ask you not to forget your father's old companion. If I come back, one of my first visits shall be to you."

Then Dolly stood up blushing, and then she said, "Thank you, very much; I shall never forget you. I, too, am going away—to India—with ——" and she looked at Henley, who was at that moment receiving the parting fire of the lively lady. There was no time to say more; she put out her hand with a grateful pressure. Colonel Fane watched Dolly as she walked away in the procession. For her sake he said a few civil words to Henley; but he was disappointed in him. "I don't think poor Stan Vanborough would have approved of such a cut-and-dry son-in-law," the Colonel said to himself as he lighted his cigar and came away into the open street.

CHAPTER VI.

"ONLY GEORGE."

Call as thou wilt, thou call'st in vain,
No voice sends back thy name again.

THOUGHTS seem occasionally to have a life of their own—a life independent; sometimes they are even stronger than the thinkers, and draw them relentlessly along. They seize hold of outward circumstances with their strong grip. How strangely a dominant thought sometimes runs through a whole epoch of life!

With some holy and serene natures, this thought is peace in life; with others, it is human love, that troubled love of God.

The moonlight is streaming over London; and George is not very far away, driven by his master thought along a bright stream that flows through the gates and by the down-trodden roads that cross Hyde Park. The skies, the streets, are silver and purple; abbey-towers and far-away houses rise dim against the stars; lights burn in shadowy windows. The people passing by, and even George, hurrying along in his many perplexities, feel the life and the echo everywhere of some mystical chord of nature and human nature striking in response. The very iron rails along

the paths seemed turned to silver. George leaps over a silver railing, and goes towards a great sea of moonlight lying among the grass and encircled by shadowy trees.

In this same moonlit stream, flowing into the little drawing-room of the bow-windowed house in Old Street, sits Rhoda, resting her head against the pane of the lantern-like window, and thinking over the events of the last two days.

On the whole, she feels that she has acted wisely and for the best. Lady Sarah seemed to think so—Uncle John said no word of blame. It was unfortunate that Aunt Morgan's curiosity should have made her insist upon reading George's letter; but no harm had come of it. Dolly, of course, was unreasonable. Rhoda, who was accustomed to think of things very definitely, began to wonder what Frank Raban would think of it all, and whether Uncle John would tell him. She thought that Mr. Raban would not be sorry to hear of what had occurred. What a pity George was not more like Mr. Raban or Robert Henley. How calm they were; while he—he was unbearable; and she was very glad it was all over between them. Lady Sarah was evidently deeply offended with him.

"I hope she will leave him *something*," thought Rhoda. "He will never be able to make his way. I can see that; and he is so rough, and I am such a poor little thing," and Rhoda sighed. "I shall always

feel to him as if he were a brother, and I shall tell Mr. Raban so if——"

Here Rhoda looked up, and almost screamed out, for there stood George, rippling with moonlight, watching her through the window from the opposite side of the street. He looked like a ghost as he leant against the railings. He did not care who noticed him, nor what other people might think of him. He had come all this way only to see Rhoda once more, and there she was, only separated from him by a pane of glass.

When Rhoda looked up, George came across and stood under the window. The moonlight stream showed him a silver figure plain marked upon the darkness. There she sat with a drooping head and one arm lightly resting against the bar. Poor boy! He had started in some strange faith that he should find her. He had come up all the way only to look at her once more. All his passionate anger had already died away. He had given up hope, but he had not given up love; and so he stood there wild and haggard, with pulses throbbing. He had scarcely eaten anything since the evening before. He had gone back to Cambridge he knew not why. He had lain awake all night, and all day he had been lying in his boat hiding under the trees along the bank, looking up at the sky and cursing his fate.

Rhoda looked up. George, with a quick movement, pointed to the door, and sprang up the steps of the house. He must speak to her now that she had

seen him. For what else had he come? She was frightened, and did not move at first in answer to his signs. She was alone. Aunt Morgan and the girls were drinking tea at the schools, but Uncle John was in the study. She did not want him to see George. It would only make a fuss and an explanation—there had been too much already. She got up and left the window, and then went into the hall and stood by the door undecided; and as she stood there she heard a low voice outside say, "Rhoda! let me in."

Rhoda still hesitated. "Let me in," said the voice again, and she opened the door a very little way, and put her foot against it.

"Good-night, George," she said, in a whisper. "Good-night. Go home. Dolly is so anxious about you."

"I have come to see you," said George. "Why won't you let me in, Rhoda?"

"I am afraid," said Rhoda.

"You need not be afraid, Rhoda," he said, going back a step. "Dear, will you forgive me for having frightened you?" and he came nearer again.

"I can't—go, go," cried Rhoda, hastily. "Here is some one," and suddenly, with all her might, she pushed the door in his face. It shut with a bang, with all its iron knobs and locks rattling.

"What is it?" said John Morgan, looking out of his study.

"I had opened the door, Uncle John," said Rhoda. Her heart beat a little. Would George go away?

She thought she heard footsteps striking down the street. Then she felt more easy. She told herself once more that it was far better to have no scenes nor explanations, and she sat down quietly to her evening's task in a corner of her uncle's study. She was making some pinafores for the little Costellos, and she tranquilly stitched and tucked and hemmed. John Morgan liked to see her busy at her womanly work, her little lamp duly trimmed, and her busy fingers working for others more thriftless.

And outside in the moonlight George walked away in a new fury. What indignity had he subjected himself to? He gave a bitter sort of laugh. He had not expected much, but this was worse than anything he had expected. Reproaches, coldness, indifference, all these he was prepared for. He knew in his heart of hearts that Rhoda did not care for him; and what further wrong could she do him than this injury that people inflict every day upon each other? She had added scorn to her indifference; and again George laughed to himself, thinking of this wooden door Rhoda had clapped upon his passion, and her summary way of thrusting him out.

At one time, instead of banging the door, she used to open it wide. She used to listen to him, with her wonderful dark eyes on his face. Now, what had happened? He was the same man, she was the same woman, and nothing was the same. George mechanically walked on towards his own home—if Church House could be so called. He went across

the square, and by a narrow back street, and he tried the garden gate, and found it open, and went in, with some vague idea of finding Dolly, and calling her to the bench beside the pond, and of telling her of all his trouble. That slam of the door kept sounding in his ears, a sort of knell to his love.

But George was in no vein of luck that night. The garden was deserted and mysterious, heavy with sweet scents in the darkness. He went down the dark path and came back again, and there was a rustle among the trees; and as he walked across the lawn towards the lighted window of the oak-room, he heard two voices clear in the silence, floating up from some kitchen below. He knew Sam's croak; he did not recognise the other voice.

"Mademoiselle is gone to dance. I like to dance too," it said. "Will you come to a ball and dance with me, Mr. Sam?"

Then followed old Sam's chuckle. "I'll dance with you, Mademoiselle," he said.

George thought it sounded as if some evil spirit of the night were mocking his trouble. And so Dolly was dancing while he was roaming about in his misery. Even Dolly had forgotten his pain. Even Rhoda had turned him out. Who cared what happened to him now?

He went to the window of the oak-room and looked in. Lady Sarah was sitting there alone, shading her eyes from the light. There were papers all round about her. The lamp was burning behind her,

and the light was reflected in the narrow glass above her tall chimney-piece.

He saw her put out her hand and slowly take a paper that was lying on the table, and tear it down the middle. Poor Aunt Sarah! she looked very old and worn and sad. How ill he had repaid her kindness! She should be spared all further anxiety and trouble for him. Then he put out his two hands with a wild farewell motion. He had not meant her to see him, but the window was ajar and flew open, and then he walked in; and Lady Sarah, looking up, saw George standing before her. He was scarcely himself all this time: if he had found Dolly all might have ended differently.

"George?" said Lady Sarah, frightened by his wild looks, "what has happened, my dear?"

"I have come to say good-by to you," he wildly cried. "Aunt Sarah, you will never have any more trouble with me. You have been a thousand times too good to me!" And he flung his two arms round her neck and kissed her, and almost before she could speak he was gone. . . .

A few minutes later Marker heard a fall, and came running upstairs. She found Lady Sarah lying half-conscious on the ground.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SLOW SAD HOURS.

And thou wert sad, yet I was not with thee;
And thou wert sick, and yet I was not there.

BYRON.

DOLLY and her mother had left the Middletons' when John Morgan drove up in a hansom, with a message from his mother to bring them back at once. The servant told him that they were only just gone, and he drove off in pursuit. Bucklersbury House was blazing in the darkness, with its many windows open and alight, and its crowds pouring in and its music striking up. Morgan sprang out of his cab and hurried across the court, and under the horses' noses, and pushed among the footmen to the great front door where the inscribing angels of the *Morning Post* were stationed. The servants would have sent him back, but he told his errand in a few hasty words, and was allowed to walk into the hall. He saw a great marble staircase all alight, and people going up; and, by some good fortune, one of the very first persons he distinguished was Dolly, who had only just come, and who was following her mother and Robert. She, too, caught sight of the familiar face in the hall below, and stopped short.

"Mamma," she said, "there is John Morgan making signs. Something has happened."

Mrs. Palmer did not choose to hear. She was going in; she was at the gates of Paradise: she was not going to be kept back by John Morgan. There came a cheerful clang of music from above.

Dolly hesitated; the curate beckoned to her eagerly. "Mamma, I must go back to him," said Dolly, and before her mother could remonstrate she had stopped short and slid behind a diplomat, a lord with a blue ribbon, an aged countess; in two minutes she was at the foot of the staircase, Robert meanwhile serenely proceeding ahead, and imagining that his ladies were following.

In two words, John Morgan had told Dolly to get her shawl, that her aunt was ill, that she had been asking for her. Dolly flew back to the cloak-room: she saw her white shawl still lying on the table, and she seized it and ran back to John Morgan again, and then they had hurried through the court and among the carriages to the place where the hansom was waiting.

"And I was away from her!" said Dolly. That was nearly all she said. It was her first trouble—overwhelming, unendurable, bewildering, as first troubles are. When they drove up to Church House, the front looked black, and closed, and terrible somehow. Dolly's heart beat as she went in.

Everything seemed a little less terrible when she had run upstairs, and found her aunt lying in the familiar room, with a faint odour of camphor and chloroform, and Marker coming and going very quietly.

Mrs. Morgan was there with her bonnet cocked a little on one side; she came up and took Dolly's hand with real kindness, and said some words of encouragement, and led her to the bedside. As Dolly looked at Aunt Sarah's changed face, she gulped for the first time one of life's bitter draughts. They don't last long, those horrible moments; they pass on, but they leave a burning taste; it comes back again and again with the troubles of life.

Lady Sarah seemed to recognise Dolly when she first came in, then she relapsed again, and lay scarce conscious, placid, indifferently waiting the result of all this nursing and anxious care. The struggles of life and its bustling anxieties had passed away from that quiet room, never more to return.

Dolly sat patiently by the bedside. She had not taken off her evening dress, she never moved, she scarcely breathed, for fear of disturbing her dear sick woman. If Frank Raban could have seen her then, he would not have called her cold! Those loving looks and tender ways might almost have poured new life into the worn-out existence that was ebbing away. The night sped on, as such nights do pass. She heard the sound of carriage-wheels coming home at last, and crept downstairs to meet the home-comers.

Dolly did not ask her mother what had delayed her when the two came in. She met them with her pale face. She was still in her white dress, with the dying roses in her hair. Henley, who had meant to reproach her for deserting them without a word, felt

ashamed for once before her. She seemed to belong to some other world, far away from that from which he had just come. She told her story very simply. The doctors said there had been one attack such as this once before, which her aunt had kept concealed from them all. They ordered absolute quiet. Marker was to be nurse, and one other person. "Of course that must be me, mamma. I think Aunt Sarah would like me best," she said, with a faint smile. "Mrs. Morgan! No, dear mamma, not Mrs. Morgan." Then suddenly she burst into tears. "Oh, mamma, I have never seen any one so ill," she said; but the next minute she had overcome her emotion, and wiped her eyes.

"My dearest child, it is most distressing, and that you should have missed your ball, too!" said Philippa. "I said all along, if you remember, that she was looking a perfect wreck. You would not listen to me. Robert, turn that sofa out of the draught. I shall not go to bed. Julie can come down here and keep me company after you go."

"I must go," said Robert; "I have still some work to finish. Take care of yourself, Dora—remember you belong to me now. I hope there will be better news in the morning."

From one room to the other, all the next day, Dolly went with her heavy heart—it seemed to drag at her as she moved, to dull her very anxiety. It was only a pain, it did not rise to the dignity of an emotion. Mrs. Palmer felt herself greatly neglected; she was taken ill in the afternoon and begged to see the

doctor, who made light of her ailment; towards evening Mrs. Palmer was a great deal better. She came down into the drawing-room, and sent Eliza Twells over for John Morgan. Lady Sarah still lay stricken silent, but her pulse was better, the doctor said: she could move her arm a little: it had been lying helpless before. Faithful Marker sat by her side, rubbing her cold hands.

"Aunt Sarah, do you know me?" whispered Dolly, bending over her.

Lady Sarah faintly smiled in answer.

"Tell George to come back," she said slowly. "Dolly, I did as you wished; are you satisfied?" She had gone back to the moment when she was taken ill.

"Dearest Aunt Sarah," said Dolly, covering her hand with kisses. Then she ran down to tell her mother the good news. "Aunt Sarah was rallying, was talking more like herself again. We only want George to make her well again. He must come. Where is he? Why does he not come?"

"Don't ask *me* anything about George," said Mrs. Palmer, putting up her hands.

This was the day after the ball, but no George came, although Dolly looked for him at every instant. John Morgan, of his own accord, sent a second message to him and another to Raban. In the course of the day an answer arrived from the tutor: "*G. left Cambridge yesterday. Your telegram to him lying unopened.*"

CHAPTER VIII.

IN AN EMPTY ROOM.

Nor dare I chide the world-without-end hour.

SHAKSPEARE.

THE next day Dolly, coming down into the garden, found Raban with her mother, and she went up eagerly to meet him, hoping for the news she was looking for. But news there was none, although her mother, arm-in-arm with Raban, had been for the last hour slowly pacing the gravel-walks, recapitulating all their anxieties and all the complaints they had against that tiresome boy.

"The Admiral will be so shocked. I expect him hourly; and I look to *you*, Mr. Raban, to tell me the plain truth."

The plain truth was that Frank could discover nothing of George. All that long day he had followed up every trace, been everywhere, questioned every one, including Rhoda, without result. He had come now in the faint hope of finding him at home after all. When Dolly came to meet them, he thought she looked anxious enough already, and he made light of his long efforts, and shrugged his shoulders.

"I have no doubt George will turn up at Cambridge in the course of a day or two. I have some

business calls me away. I will write immediately on my return," he said.

Frank saw Dolly's look of surprise and disappointment as she turned away, and his heart ached for her; but what could he do? He watched her as she turned back towards the house again, walking slowly and with a thoughtful bent head.

"It is quite painful to see Dolly, she has no feeling whatever for me left," cried Mrs. Palmer. "Ever since dear George's conduct, I see the saddest change in her. I can do nothing. I would drive her out. Colonel Witherington offered me his sister's barouche any day, but Dolly won't hear of it. Dolly, you know, is simply impossible," said Mrs. Palmer. "I never knew a more desponding nature."

"Indeed?" said Raban.

It was not his place to be sorry for her. He was not able to shield her from grief. It was not his place to think for her, to love her in her trouble. It was not for him: all this was for Robert Henley to do.

There was a great red sunset in the sky, islands floating, and lakes and seas of crimson light overhead, as Dolly walked sadly and slowly into the house, and went back to the dim sick-room.

There is no need to dwell upon the slow hours. Dolly found that they came to an end somehow. And all the time one miserable conviction pursued her—George was gone. Of this she was convinced, notwithstanding all they could say to reassure her. While

they had been expecting him, and blaming him, and wondering, and discussing his plans, he had fled from them all. Dolly at first did not face the truth, for she had sat by her aunt's bedside half dull, half absorbed by her present anxiety; but when Lady Sarah began to rally a little, the thought of George grew more constant, the longing for news more unendurable; time seemed longer: it became an eternity at last. One day she felt as if she could bear it no longer.

Robert found her looking very much moved; her cheeks were glowing, her eyes were shining blue; she had a cloak on her arm, and some white summer dress, and she began tying her bonnet-strings nervously.

"Robert, I want you to take me to Cambridge," she said. "I want to go now. I know I could find him—I dreamt it. Aunt Sarah wants him back directly. . . ."

"You are quite unreasonable, dearest," said Robert, soothingly.

"I am not; I am reasonable," poor Dolly said, with an effort at self-control. "Mr. Raban cannot find him. Robert, let me go." And Robert yielded reluctantly to her wish.

"Have you got a *Bradshaw* in the house?" said he.

Dolly had got one all ready, with the page turned down—she could spare but a few hours, and was in a hurry to get back.

After all, sympathy is more effectually adminis-

tered by indirect means than by the crowbars of consolation with which our friends, even the kindest, are apt to belabour our grief. According to some, people don't die, they don't fall ill, they don't change, everything always goes right. Some reproach us with our want of faith; others drag it forth—that silent sorrow that would fain lie half-asleep and resting in our hearts. Poor Dolly could not speak of George scarcely even to Robert. She sat very silently in the railway-carriage, her hands lying listlessly in her lap, while he refuted all the fears she had not even allowed herself to realise. This state of things annoyed Robert. He hated to see people dull and indifferent. It was distressing and tiresome too.

Few people were about when Robert and Dolly came across the great triumphant court of St. Thomas, with its gateways and many stony eyes and narrow doorways. They were on their way to All Saints', close by. The place seemed chiefly given over to laundresses. A freshman was standing under the arched gateway that leads to the inner court; he was reading some neatly-written announcement in the glass shrine hanging outside the buttery. The oaken doors were closed. Robert, seeing a friend crossing the court, went away to speak to him. Dolly walked on a little, and stood by the railings, and the flight of steps that lead into the beautiful inner court of this great Palace of Art. She watched the many lines flowing in waves of stone, of mist. At the far end of the arched enclosure were iron-scrolled gates, with

green and gold, and misty veils of autumn drifting in the gardens beyond. And then she remembered the summer's day when she last stood there with George, and as she thought of him suddenly his image came before her so distinctly that she almost called out his name. It was but an instant's impression; it was gone; the steps were Robert's; the image was in her own mind.

"Are you tired of waiting?" said Henley. "Now, if you like we will go on to All Saints'," he said.

It seemed to Dolly as if she was looking at the old summer day, dimmed, silenced, saddened, seen through some darkened pane, as they went on together, passing under archways and galleries, and coming at last into the quaint and tranquil court that Dolly remembered so vividly. There she had stood; and there was George's staircase, and there was his name painted up, and there was his window with its lattice.

Robert went off for the key of George's room, and Dolly waited. It was so sweet, so sad, so tranquil, like the end of a long life. Dolly wandered in and out the narrow galleries; the silence of the place comforted her. She was glad to be alone a little bit, unconstrained, to feel as she felt, and not as she ought to feel; quietly despondent, not nervously confident, as they would all have her be. It was a crumbling, sweet, sunshiny sort of waking dream. Some gleams had broken through the clouds, and shone reflected from the many lattice windows round about the little

court. She heard some voices, and some young men hurried by, laughing as they went. They did not see the young lady with the sweet sad face standing under the gallery. Chrysanthemums were growing up against the wall, with faint lilac and golden heads, the last bright tints left upon the once gorgeous palette of summer. A delicate cool sky hung overhead, and the light was becoming brighter. Dolly passed an open door, and peeped in from the quaint gallery to a warm and darkened room, panelled and carpeted. It was dark and untenanted; a fire was burning in the grate.

"That is Fieldbrook's room; he will give us some tea presently," said Robert, coming up; "but now we can get into George's."

Robert, who seemed to have keys for every keyhole, opened an oak door, and led the way up some steps. George's room was on the first floor. Henley went in first, opened the window, dragged forward a chair. "If you will rest here," he said, "I will go and find Fieldbrook. They tell me he last heard from George. I have to speak to the Vice-Chancellor too." Then he was gone again, after looking about to see that there was nothing he could do for her.

Dolly was glad to be alone. She sat down in George's three-sided chair, resting her head upon her hand. She was in his room. Everything in the place seemed to have a voice, and to speak to her—"George, George," it all said. She looked out of the little window across the court. She could see the old

windows of the library shining, and then she heard more voices, and more young men hurried by, with many footsteps.

Ever after, Dolly remembered that last half-hour spent in George's rooms *with* George: so it seemed to her looking back from a time when she had ceased to hope. She went to the writing-table, and mechanically began to straighten the toys and pens lying on the cloth. There was the little dagger his mother had sent him from India years before; the desk she had given him out of her savings; and it occurred to her to open the lid, of which she knew the trick. She pushed the spring, and the top flew up with a sudden jerk, as it always did. Then Dolly saw that the box was full of papers hastily thrown in, verses, notes of lectures, and a letter torn through. "Dearest Rh—" it began. She had no great shame looking over George's papers, a tear fell on the dear heap as she bent over the signs and ink-marks that told of her poor boy's trouble. What was this? a letter stamped and addressed to herself. Had it been thrown in with the rest by mistake? She tore it open hastily, with eager hands. He must have written the night of their water-party: it had no date:—

DEAREST DOLLY (said the crooked lines)—This is one more good-by, and one more service that I want you to do me; and you have never grudged any human being love or help. I am going, and before I go I shall make my will, and I shall leave what little I have—not to you—but to Rhoda, and will you see to this? I sometimes think she has not even a heart to help her through life; she will like my money better than me. It is quite late at night, but I cannot sleep; she comes and awakens me in my dreams. I shall go away from this as soon as the gates are open. It is no use struggling against my

fate; others are giving their lives for a purpose, and I shall join them if I can. I have been flung from my anchor here, and the waves seem to close over me. If I live you will hear from me. Dearest old Dolly, take warning by me and don't expect too much. God bless you!

G. V.

Will you pay Miller at the boat-house 2*l.* 10*s.* I owe him? I think I have cleared up all other scores. I will leave the papers with him. I shall not come back here any more.

That was all. She was standing with her letter still in her hand, blankly looking at it, when the door opened and Tom Morgan came in. "'If I live.' What did he mean? 'Ask at the boat-house?'" She laid the letter down and went on turning over the papers without noticing the young man.

Tom walked in with a broad grin and great volubility. "Well!" said he, cheerfully, "I thought it was you! I was walking with Magniac and some others, and noticed the windows open, and I saw you standing just where you are now, and I said to Magniac, 'I know that lady.' He wouldn't believe me; but I was right, knew I was. How are you and how is Lady Sarah? Where is George? When did he come back?" Then suddenly remembering some rumour to which he had paid but little heed at first, "Nothing wrong, I hope?" said Tom.

"Tom! where is this?" said Dolly, without any preamble, in her old abrupt way, and she gave him a crumpled bill which she had been examining.

MR. VANBUG *to* J. MILLER—
To hieir of the *Wave* twelve hours.
To man's time, &c. &c.
To new coteing hir with tare, &c.

"I want to go there," she said. "Will you show me the way?"

"To the boat-house?" said Tom, doubtfully, looking at the bill. "Miller's, you mean?"

She saw him hesitate.

"I must go," she cried. "You must take me. Is it Miller's? Show me the way, Tom."

"Of course I can show you the way if you wish it," said Tom.

He looked even more stupid than usual, but he did not like to refuse. He had to be in Hall by three o'clock, that was why he had hesitated. He had been thinking of his dinner; but Dolly began to tie on her bonnet. She hurried out, and ran downstairs, and he followed her across the court into the street. He was not loth to be seen walking with so pretty a young lady. He nodded to several of his friends with velvet bands upon their gowns; a professor went by, Tom raised his well-worn cap.

Dolly might have been amused at any other time by the quaint mediæval ways of the old place.

It was out of term-time, but there had been some special meeting of the college magnates. Crimson coats and black, square caps and tassels, and quaint old things were passing. The fifteenth century was standing at a street corner. To-day heartily shook hands with 1500 and hurried on. Dolly saw it all without seeing it. Tom Morgan tried to give her the latest news.

"That is Brown," said he, "the new Professor of

Modern Literature." Dolly never even turned her head to look after Brown.

"There's Smith," said Tom: "they say he will be in the first six for the Mathematical Tripos."

Then they came out of the busy High Street by a narrow lane, with brick walls on either side. It led to the mill by the river, and beyond the river spread a great country of water-meadows. It was a world, not of to-day or of 1500, but of all times and all hours. Pollards were growing at intervals, the river flowed by dull and sluggish, the land, too, seemed to flow dull and sluggish to meet a grey horizon. There were no animals to be seen, only these pollard-trees at intervals, and the spires of Cambridge crowding in the mist.

CHAPTER IX.

THE POLLARD-TREES.

> Next Camus, reverend sire, went fooling slow—
> His mantle hairy and his bonnet sedge,
> Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge
> Like to that sanguine flower inscribed with woe.
> "Ah! who hath rest?" quoth he. . . .
>
> LYCIDAS.

MISS VANBOROUGH walked on; she seemed to know the way by some instinct; sometimes she looked at the water, but it gave her a sort of vertigo. Tom looked at Dolly with some admiration as she passed along the bank, with her clear-cut face and stately figure, following the narrow pathway. They came at last to a bend of the river where some boats were lying high and dry in the grass, and where a little boat-house stood upon a sort of jutting-out island among tall trees upspringing suddenly in the waste: tall sycamore, ivy-grown stumps, greens of every autumnal shade, golden leaves dropping in lazy showers on the grass or drifting into the sluggish stream, along which they floated back to Cambridge once more. It was a deserted-looking grove, melancholy and romantic. But few people came there. But there was a ferryman and a black boat-house, and a flat ferry-boat anchored to the shore. Some bird gave a cry and flew past, otherwise the place was still with that peculiar river

silence of tall weeds straggling, of trees drooping their green branches, of water lapping on the brink.

"Is this the place you wanted?" said Tom, "or was it the other boat-house after all?"

Dolly walked on, without answering him. She beckoned to the boatman; and then, as he came towards her, her heart began to beat so that she could scarcely speak or ask the question that she had in her mind to ask. "Has my brother been here? Where is his letter? Is the *Wave* safe in your little boat-house?" This was what she would have said, only she could not speak. Some strange fever had possessed her and brought her so far: now her strength and courage suddenly forsook her, and she stopped short, and stood holding to an old rotten post that stood by the river-side.

"Take care," said Tom; "that ain't safe. You might fall in, and the river is deep just here."

She turned such a pale face to him that the young man suddenly began to wonder if there was more in it all than he had imagined.

"It's perfectly safe I mean," he said. "Why, you don't mean to say ——"

He turned red; he wished with all his heart that he had never brought her there—that he could jump into the river—that he had stayed to dine in Hall. To his unspeakable relief unexpected help appeared.

"Why, there is Mr. Raban!" said Tom, as Raban came out of the boat-house, and walked across under the trees to meet them.

Dolly waited for the two men to come up to her, as she stood by her stump among the willow-trees. Raban did not seem surprised to see her. He took no notice of Tom, but he walked straight up to Dolly.

"You have come," he said; "I had just sent you a telegraphic message."

His manner was so kind and so gentle that it frightened her more than if he had spoken with his usual coldness.

"What is it?" she said, "and why have you come here? Have you too heard . . .?"

She scanned his face anxiously.

Then she looked from him to the old boatman, who was standing a few steps off in his shabby red flannel-shirt, with a stolid brown face and white hair: a not unpicturesque figure standing by the edge of the stream. Winds and rain and long seasons had washed all expression out of old Miller's bronzed face.

"George came here on Tuesday," said Raban to Dolly; "I only heard of it this morning. Miller tells me he gave him a letter or a paper to keep."

"I know it," said Dolly, turning to the old boatman. "I am Mr. Vanborough's sister; I have come for the letter," she said quickly, and she held out her hand.

"This gentleman come and asked me for the paper," said the old man, solemnly, "and he stands by to contradict me if I speak false; but if the right party as was expected to call should wish for to see

it, my wish is to give satisfaction all round," said the old man. "I knows your brother well, Miss, and he know me, and my man too, for as steady a young man and all one could wish to see. The gentleman come up quite hearty one morning, and ask Bill and me as a favour to hisself to sign the contents of the paper; and he seal it up, and it is safe, as you see, with the seal compact;" and then from his pockets came poor George's packet, a thin blue paper folded over, and sealed with his ring. "Mr. Vanbug he owe me two pound twelve and sixpence," old Miller went on, still grasping his paper as if loth to give it up, "and he said as how you would pay the money, Miss."

Dolly's hands were fumbling at her purse in a moment.

"I don't want nothing for my trouble," said the old fellow. "I knows Mr. Vanbug well, and I thank you, Miss, and you will find it all as the gentleman wished, and good-morning," said old Miller, trudging hastily away, for a passenger had hailed him from the opposite shore.

"I know what it is," said Dolly. "See, he has written my name upon it, Mr. Raban: it is his will. He told me to come here. He is gone. I found his letter." She began to quiver. "I don't know what he means."

"Don't be frightened," said Raban smiling, and very kindly. "He was seen at Southampton quite well and in good spirits. He has enlisted. That is what

he means. You have interest, we must get him a commission; and if this makes him more happy, it is surely for the best."

"Perhaps you are right," she said, struggling not to cry. "How did you hear? How kind you have been. How shall we ever thank you!" Her colour was coming and going.

"It was a mere chance," Raban said. (It was one of those chances that come to people who have been working unremittingly to bring a certain result to pass.) "Don't thank me," he continued in a low voice; "you have never understood how glad I am to be allowed to feel myself your friend sometimes."

Raban might have said more, but he looked up, and saw Robert's black face frowning down upon them. Robert was the passenger who hailed old Miller. For an instant Frank had forgotten that Robert existed. He turned away hastily, and went and stared into the water at a weed floating by. The old boatman waiting by the punt sat on the edge of the shore, watching the little scene, and wondering what the pretty lady's tears might be about. Tom also assisted, open-mouthed—the Morgan family were not used to tears. Mrs. Morgan never cried; not even when Tom broke his leg upon the ice.

Robert was greatly annoyed. He had come all the way, along the opposite bank, looking for Dolly, who had not waited for him; who had gone off without a word from the place where he had expected to find her. Not even her incoherent "Oh, Robert, I am

so sorry—I have heard, Mr. Raban has heard—he has found George for us!" not even her trustful, gentle look, as she sprang to meet him, seemed to mollify him. He looked anything but sympathising as he said, "I have been looking for you everywhere."

("Brown must have told him," thought Tom Morgan, who was wondering how he had found them out.)

"You really must not run off in this way. I told you all along that all this—a—anxiety was quite unnecessary. George is well able to take care of himself. If I had not met Professor Brown, I really don't know now ——"

"But what is to be done, Robert? Listen," interrupted Dolly. "He has enlisted; he was at Southampton yesterday."

And together they told Henley what had happened. Robert took it very coolly.

"Of course he has turned up," said Robert, "and we must now take the matter into our own hands, and see what is best to be done. I really think" (with a laugh) "he has done the best thing he could do."

Dolly was hurt again by his manner. Raban had said the same thing, but it had not jarred upon her.

"I see you do not agree with me," continued Robert. "Perhaps, Raban, you will give me the name of the person who recognised George Vanborough? I will see him myself."

"He is a man whom we all know," said Raban,

gravely,—"Mr. Penfold, my late wife's father," and he looked Robert full in the face.

Dolly wondered why Robert flushed and looked uncomfortable.

"Come," he said, suddenly drawing her hand through his arm with some unnecessary violence, "shall we walk back, Dora? There are some other things which I must see about, and I should be glad to consult you immediately." And he would have walked away at once, but she hung back for a moment to say one more grateful word to Frank.

Then Robert impatiently dragged her off, and Raban, with his foot, kicked at a stone that happened to be lying in the path, and it fell with a circling plash into the river.

Meanwhile, Robert was walking away, and poor Dolly, who had not yet recovered from her agitation, was stumbling alongside, weary and breathless. He had her arm in his; he was walking very rapidly; she could hardly keep up with his strides.

This was the moment chosen by Robert Henley to say:—"I want you now to bring your mind to something which concerns myself, Dora, and you. I came here to-day, not only to please you, but also because I had business to attend to. The Vice-Chancellor has, really in the most pleasant and flattering manner, been speaking to me about my appointment, and I have brought a letter for you."

"I am so confused, Robert," said Dolly.

"I will read it to you, then," said Robert; and

immediately, in a clear, trumpet-like voice, he began to do so, stopping every now and then to give more emphasis to his sentences.

The letter was from the Board of Management of the College of Boggleywollah. They seemed to be in a difficulty. The illness of Mr. Martindale had already caused great delay and inconvenience; the number of applications had never been so numerous; the organisation never so defective. In the event of Mr. Henley's being able to anticipate his departure by three weeks, the Board was empowered to offer him a quarter's additional salary, dating from Midsummer instead of from Michaelmas: it would be a very great assistance to them if he could fall in with this proposal. A few lines of entreaty from Mr. Martindale were added.

"It will have to come sooner or later," said Henley; "it is unfortunate everything happening just now. My poor Dora, I am so sorry for all the anxiety you have had," he said, "and yet I am not sure that this is the best thing that could happen under the circumstances;" and he attempted to take her hand and draw her to him.

Dolly stood flushed and troubled, and unresponding. She hardly took Robert's meaning in, so absorbed had she been in other thoughts. For a moment after he spoke she stood looking away across the river to the plain beyond.

"The college must wait," said she, wearily; then suddenly—"You know I couldn't leave them now,

Aunt Sarah and every one, and you, Robert, couldn't leave me. Don't let us talk about it!"

Robert did not answer immediately. "It is no use," he said deliberately, "shirking disagreeable subjects. My dearest Dora, life has to be faced, and one's day's work has to be done. My work is to organise the College at Boggleywollah; you must consider that; and a woman's work is to follow her husband. Every woman, when she marries, must expect to give up her old ties and associations, or there could be no possible union otherwise; and my wife can be no exception to the general rule ——"

"Robert, don't talk in this way," said Dolly, passionate and nervous. "I don't want you to frighten me."

"You are unreasonable again, dearest," said Robert, in his usual formula. "You must be patient, and let me settle for us both."

Robert might have been more touched if Dolly had spoken less angrily and decidedly.

"If I put off going," said Robert, soothingly, "I lose a great deal more than a quarter's salary—I lose the prestige; the great advantage of finding Martindale. I lose three months, which in the present state of affairs, may cause irreparable hindrance. Three months?—six months! Lady Sarah's illness may last any indefinite period: who can say how long it may last? and Lady Sarah herself, I am convinced, would never wish you to change your plans, and your mother will soon have her husband to protect her. You

would not have the heart to send me off alone, Dolly. Is the alternative so very painful to you?" he said again. And Robert smiled with a calm and not very anxious expression, and looking down at her.

Suddenly it all rushed over Dolly. He was in earnest!—in earnest!—impossible. He meant her to go off now,—directly—without seeing George; without hearing from him again; while her aunt was lying on her sick bed. How could she go? He should not have asked such a sacrifice. She did not pause to think.

"No, a thousand times no, Robert!" she cried passionately. "You *can't* go. If you love me, stay," she said, with great agitation. "I know you love me. I know you will do as I wish—as it is right to do. Don't go. Dearest Robert, you *mustn't* go." Her voice faltered; she spoke in her old soft tone, with imploring looks, and trembling hands put out. Robert Henley might have hesitated, but the "*must not*" had spoilt it all.

"You know what pain it gives me to refuse your request," said Robert; "but I have considered the subject as anxiously on your account as mine. I—really I cannot give up my career at this juncture. You have promised to come with me. If you love me you will not hesitate. You can do your aunt no real good by remaining. You can do George no good; and, besides, you belong to me," said Robert, growing more and more annoyed. "As I told you

before, I must now be your first consideration; otherwise ——" He stopped.

"Otherwise what?" said Dolly.

"Otherwise you would not be happy as my wife," he said, beating his foot upon the gravel, and looking steadily before him.

"Robert!" said Dolly, blushing up, "you would not wish me to be ungrateful."

"To whom?" said Robert. "You propose to postpone everything indefinitely, at a time when I had fully calculated upon being settled in life; when I had accepted an appointment chiefly with a view to our speedy marriage. There is no saying how long your conscience may detain us," cried Henley, getting more and more provoked; "nor how many people may fall ill, nor how often George may think proper to make off. You do not perceive how matters stand, dear Dora."

Was this all he had to say? Her heart began to beat with a swift emotion.

"I understand you quite well," she said, in a low voice. "But, Robert, I, too, have made up my mind, and I cannot leave them, not even for you. You should never have asked it of me," she cried, with pardonable indignation.

"I am not aware that I have ever asked anything that was not for your good as well as my own," said Henley, in an offended tone. "I begin to think you have never loved me, Dora, or you would not reproach me with my love for you. Who has in-

fluenced you?" said he, jealously. "What does it all mean?"

She stopped short, and stood looking at him steadily, wistfully—not as she used to look once, but with eyes that seemed to read him through and through, until the tears came once more to blind their keen sight.

Raban, who had crossed by the ferry, and who was walking back along the opposite side, saw the two standing by the river-side, a man and a woman, with a plain beyond, and a city beyond the plain.

The sun was setting sadly grey and russet; the long day's mists dispersing; light clouds were slowly rising; turf and leaves stood out against the evening; it was all clear and sweet, and faintly coloured: a tranquil peace seemed to have fallen everywhere. It was not radiance, but peace and subdued calm. Who does not know these evenings? are they sad? are they happy? A break in the shadow. A passing medley of the lights of heaven and earth, of sweet winds and rising vapours. . . . The cool breeze came blowing into their faces, and Dolly turned her head away and looked across the river to the opposite bank. When she spoke again she was her old self once more.

She was quite calm now; her eyes no longer wet. "Robert," she said, "I have something to tell you. I have been thinking things over, and I see that it is right that you should go; but it is also right that I should stay," said Dolly, looking him steadily in the

face; "and perhaps in happier times you will let me come to you, or come back for me, and you must not—you will not—think I do not love you because of this."

What was it in her voice that seemed to haunt him—to touch, to thrill that common-place man for one instant into some emotion? She was so simple and so sad; she looked so fair and wistful.

But it was only for an instant. "Do you mean that you wish to break the engagement?" he asked in his coldest voice.

"If we love each other what does it matter that we are free?" said Dorothea, with a very sweet look in her face. "You need fear no change in me," she said, "but I want you to be free." Her voice failed, and she began to walk on quickly.

"Remember, it is your own doing," she heard him say, as Tom Morgan, who had lingered behind, caught them up. "But we will speak of all this again," he added.

Dolly bent her head, she could not trust herself to answer.

CHAPTER X.

THUS FAR THE MILES ARE MEASURED FROM THY FRIEND.

If I leave all for thee, wilt thou exchange,
And be all to me? Shall I never miss
Home-talk and blessing and the common kiss
That comes to each in turn, nor count it strange,
When I look up, to drop on a new range
Of walls and floors, another home than this?

E. B. Browning.

The three came back to All Saints' by many a winding way. Raban met them at the college gate in his rusty black gown; he had to attend some college meeting after chapel. Two or three young men were standing about expecting them.

"You will find the tea is all ready," said Fieldbrook, gaily; "are you sure, Miss Vanborough, that you would not like something more substantial? My laundress has just been here to ask whether you were an elderly lady, and whether you would wish your bread-and-butter cut thick or thin? Let me introduce Mr. Magniac, Mr. Smith, Mr. Irvine, Mr. Richmond; Mr. Morgan you know."

Dolly smiled. The young men led her back across the court (as she crossed it the flowers were distilling their colours in the evening light); they opened the oak door of the very room she had looked into in the morning, and stood back to let her

pass. The place had been prepared for her coming. Tea was laid, and a tower of bread-and-butter stood in the middle of the table. Books were cleared away, some flowers were set out in a cup. Fieldbrook heaped on the coals and made the tea, while Raban brought her the arm-chair to rest in. It was a pretty old oak-panelled room beneath the library. A little flat kettle was boiling on the fire; the young men stood round about, kind and cheery: Dolly was touched and comforted by their kindness, and they, too, were charmed with her sweet natural grace and beauty.

It was difficult not to compare this friendly courtesy and readiness with Robert's coldness. There was Raban ready to do her bidding at any hour; here was Mr. Fieldbrook emptying the whole canister into the teapot to make her a cup of tea; Smith had rushed off to order a fly for her. Robert stood silent and black by the chimney; he never moved, nor seemed to notice her presence. If she looked at him he turned his head away, and yet he saw her plainly enough. He saw Raban too. Frank was standing behind Dolly's chair in the faint green light of the old oriel window. It tinted his old black gown and Dolly's shadowy head as she leant back against the oaken panel. One of the young men thought of an ivory head he had once seen set in a wooden frame. As for Frank, he knew that for him a pale ghost would henceforth haunt that oriel — a fair, western ghost, with anxious eyes, that were now following Robert as

he crossed the room with measured steps and went to look out for the fly.

As he left the room, they all seemed to breathe more freely. Tom Morgan and Mr. Magniac began a series of jokes; Mr. Richmond poked the fire; Mr. Irvine opened the window. Raban sat down by Dolly, and began telling her of a communication he had had from Yorkshire, from his old grandfather, who seemed disposed to take him into favour again, and who wanted him to go back and manage the estate.

"I am very much exercised about it," said Frank. "It is going into the land of bondage, you know. The old couple have used me very ill."

"But of course you must go to them," said Dolly, trying to be interested, and to forget her own perplexities. "We shall miss you dreadfully, but you must go."

"You will not miss me as I shall miss you," said Frank.

And as he spoke, Robert's head appeared at the window.

"The fly is come; don't keep it waiting, Dora," said Robert, impatiently.

"And you will let me know if ever I can do anything for you?" persisted Frank, in defiance of Henley's black looks.

"Of course I will. I shall never forget your kindness," said Dolly, quickly putting on her shawl.

The bells were clanging all over the place for an

evening service. Doors were banging, voices calling, figures came flitting from every archway.

"There goes the reader! he is late," said Tom Morgan, as a shrouded form darted across their path. Then he pointed out the Rector, a stately figure in a black and rustling silk, issuing from a side door; and then Rector, friendly young men, arches, gable-ends had vanished, and Dolly and Robert were driving and jolting through the streets together, jolting along through explanation and misunderstanding, and over one another's susceptibilities, and over chance ruts and stones on their way to the station. He began immediately:

"We were interrupted in our talk just now; but I have really very little more to say. If you are dissatisfied, if you really wish to break off your engagement, it is much better to say so at once, without making me appear ridiculous before all those men. Perhaps," said Henley, "we may have both made some great mistake, and you have seen some one whom you would prefer to myself?"

"You must not say such things, Robert," answered Dolly, with some emotion. "You know how unhappy I am. I only want you to let me love you. What more can I say?"

"Your actions and your words scarcely agree, then," said Henley, jealous and implacable. "I confess I shall be greatly surprised, on my return from India at some indefinite period, to find you still in

the same mind. I myself make no professions of extra constancy——"

"Oh, you are too cruel," cried poor Dolly, exasperated.

"Will you promise me never to see Raban, for instance?" said Robert.

"How can I make such a promise?" cried Dolly, indignant. "To turn off a kind friend for an unjust fancy! If you trust me, Robert, you must believe what I say. Anyhow, you are free. Only remember that I shall trust in your love until you yourself tell me that you no longer care for me."

The carriage stopped as she spoke. Robert got out and helped her down, produced the tickets, and paid the flyman.

The two went back in a dreary *tête-à-tête;* she wanted a heart's sympathy, and he placed a rug at her feet and pulled up the carriage window for fear of a draught. She could not thank him, nor look pleased. Her head ached, her heart ached; one expression of love, one word of faithful promise would have made the world a different place, but he had not spoken it. He had taken her at her word. She was to be bound, and he was to be free. The old gentleman opposite never looked at them, but instantly composed himself to sleep; the old lady in the corner thought she had rarely seen a more amiable and attentive young man, a more ungracious young lady.

Once only Robert made any allusion to what had

passed. "There will be no need to enter into explanations at present," he said, in a somewhat uneasy manner. "You may change your mind, Dora."

"I shall never change my mind," said Dolly, wearily, "but it is no use troubling mamma and Aunt Sarah; I will tell them that I am not going away. They shall know all when you are gone."

Dolly might have safely told Mrs. Palmer, who was not often disquieted by other people's sacrifices. With Lady Sarah it was different. But she was ill, and she had lost her grasp of life. She asked no question, only she seemed to revive from the day when Dolly told her that she was not going to leave her. It was enough for her that the girl's hand was in hers.

What is Dolly thinking of, as she stands by the sick bed, holding the frail hand? To what future does it guide her? Is it to that which Dolly has sometimes imagined contained within the walls of a home; simple, as some people's lives are, and hedged with wholesome briers, and darling home-ties, and leading straight, with great love and much happiness and sacred tears, to the great home of love? or is it to a broad way, unhedged, unfenced, with a distant horizon, a way unsheltered in stormy weather, easily missed, but wide and free and unshackled? . . .

Mrs. Palmer, who troubled herself little about the future, was for ever going off to Dean's Yard, where the Henleys were comfortably established. The eldest

daughter was married, but there were two lively girls still at home; there were young officers coming and going about the place. There was poor Jonah preparing to depart on his glorious expedition. He was in good spirits, he had a new uniform. One day, hearing his aunt's voice, he came in to show himself, accoutred and clanking with chains. He was disappointed to find that Dolly was not there as he had expected. Bell admired loudly, but her mother almost screamed to him to go and take the hideous thing off. The dry, brisk-tongued little woman was feeling his departure very acutely. She still made an effort to keep up her old cynical talk, but she broke down, poor soul, again and again; she had scarcely spirit left to contradict Philippa, or even to forbid her the house.

The first time she had seen Dolly, she had been prepared to criticise the girl; Norah and Bell were more cordial, but Lady Henley offered her niece a kid glove and a kid cheek, and was slightly disappointed to find that Dolly's frivolity, upon which she had been descanting all the way to Church House, consisted in an old grey gown and a black apron, and in two black marks under her eyes, for poor Dolly had not had much sleep after that dismal talk with Robert. This was the day after the Cambridge expedition. Miss Vanborough was looking very handsome, notwithstanding the black marks, and she unconsciously revenged herself upon Lady Henley by a certain indifference and pre-occupation, which seemed

to put her beyond the reach of that lady's passing shafts; but one of them wounded her at last.

"I suppose Lady Sarah will be left to servants when you go?" says Lady Henley. "Your mother is certainly not to be counted on; Hawtry is a much better nurse than she is. Poor dear Philippa! she sees everything reflected in a looking-glass. Your school is a different one altogether from our plain, old-fashioned country ways."

Dolly looked surprised; she had not deserved this unprovoked attack from the little gaily-dressed lady perched upon the sofa. Norah was very much distressed by her mother's rudeness; Bell was struggling with a nervous inclination to giggle, which was the effect it always produced upon her.

"I have no doubt mamma would take care of my aunt if it were necessary," said Dolly, blushing with annoyance. "But I am not going away," she said. "Robert and I have settled that it is best I should stay behind. We have made up our minds to part."

The two girls were listening open-eared. "Then she has never cared for him, after all," thought Bell.

But Lady Henley knew better: notwithstanding a more than usual share of jealousy and cross-grained-ness, she was not without a heart. Dolly's last words had been spoken very quietly, but they told the whole story. "My dear," said the little woman, jumping up suddenly and giving her a kiss, "I did not know this" (there were tears shining among the new green bonnet-strings)—"my trial is close at hand. You must for-

give me, I—I am very unhappy." She made a struggle, and recovered herself quickly, but from that minute Dolly and her Aunt Joanna were good friends.

The next time Robert called in Dean's Yard he was put through a cross-examination by Lady Henley. "When was he coming back for Dolly? what terms were they on?" Sir Thomas came in to hear all about it, and then Jonah sauntered in. "Only wish I could get a chance," said Jonah. Robert felt disinclined to give Jonah the chance he wished for. Lady Henley was now praising Dolly as much as she had abused her before, and Robert agreed to everything. But he gave no clue to the state of his mind. He was surprised to find how entirely Lady Henley ignored his feelings and sympathised with Dolly's determination to remain behind. He walked away thinking that it was far from his intention to break entirely with Dolly, but he had not forgiven her yet; he was not sorry to feel his liberty in his own hands again. He meant to come back, but he chose to do it of his own free will, and not because he was bound by any promise.

As for Dolly, she was absorbed, she was not feeling very much just then, she had been overwrought and overstrained. A dull calm had succeeded to her agitation, and besides Robert was not yet gone.

CHAPTER XI.

UNDER THE CLOCK-TOWER.

I will tell you when they parted.
When plenteous autumn sheaves were brown,
Then they parted heavy-hearted.
The full rejoicing sun looked down
As grand as in the days before:
Only to them those days of yore
Could come back nevermore.

C. ROSSETTI.

AN archway leads out of the great thoroughfare from Westminster Bridge into the sudden silence of Dean's Yard, where Sir Thomas had taken the house of a country neighbour. It stood within the cloisters of the Abbey, over-towered, over-clocked, with bells pealing high overhead (ringing the hours away, the poor mother used to think). Dolly found time one day to come for half-an-hour to see Jonah before he left. She had a great regard for him. She had also found a staunch friend in Norah with the grey eyes like her own. Bell told Dolly in confidence that her mother had intended Robert to marry Norah, but this had not at all interfered with the two girls' liking for one another. Mrs. Palmer, who was going on farther, set Dolly down at the archway, and as the girl was crossing the yard she met Robert coming from the house. He was walking along by the railing, and

among the dead leaves that were heaped there by the wind. Dolly's heart always began to beat now when she saw Robert. This time he met her, and, with something of his old manner, said, "Are you in a hurry? Will you come with me a little way? I have something to say." And he turned into the cloister: she followed him at once.

From Dean's Yard, one gateway leads to common life and to the day's work, struggling by with creaks and whips and haste; another gateway brings you to a cloister arched, silent. The day's work is over for those who are lying in the peaceful enclosure. A side door from this cloister leads into the Abbey, where, among high piles and burning windows, and the shrill sweet echoes of the Psalms, a silent voice sometimes speaks of something beyond rest, beyond our feeble mode of work and praise, and our music and Gothic types—of that which is, but which we are not.

The afternoon service was pealing on and humming within the Abbey as Dolly and Robert walked slowly along the cloister. He was silent a long time. She tried to ask him what he had to say, but she found it difficult to speak to him now. She was shy, and she scarcely knew upon what terms they were: she did not care to know. She had said that he should be free, and she meant it, and she was too generous to seek to extort unwilling promises from him, or to imply that she was disappointed that he had given none.

At last Robert spoke. "Dolly, shall you write to me?" he said.

"Yes, Robert, if you wish it," she answered, simply. "I should like to write to you."

As she looked at him, fair and blushing, Robert said suddenly, "Tell me, Dora, have you never regretted your decision?"

Dolly turned away—she could not meet his eyes. Hers fell upon a slab to the memory of some aged woman, who had, perhaps, gone through some such experience before she had been turned into a stone. Dolly was anything but stone. Tears slowly gathered in her eyes, and Robert saw them, and caught hold of her hand, and at that minute there came some pealing echo of an organ, and of voices bursting into shrill amens. All her life Dolly remembered that strange moment of parting, for parting she felt it to be. She must tell him the truth. She turned. "No, Robert—never once," she said; "although it is even harder than I thought to let you go."

They were standing by the door at the end of the first cloister. For the last time he might have spoken then, and told her that he only loved her the more, that distance was nothing to him, that time was nothing; but the service had come to an end, and while he hesitated a verger came out in his black gown, and the congregation followed—one or two strangers, then Jonah and Bell, with red eyes both of them, looking foolish somehow, and ashamed of being seen; then more strangers, and then with the last remaining

verger, came Rhoda and Zoe Morgan, who sometimes went to church at the Abbey. They all joined the young couple and walked back to the house with them.

This was Dolly's last chance for an explanation with her cousin. The time was drawing to an end, fate came in between them now, for this very afternoon it was settled rather suddenly, at Sir Thomas's request, that Robert and Jonah should go as far as Marseilles together. This was Thursday, and the young men were to start on the Saturday evening.

Lady Henley bore up very well at first, and clenched her teeth, and said they should all come to dinner on Friday.

"It is no use sitting alone and crying one's eyes out," said the poor woman valiantly, and she made Sir Thomas ask a couple of Yorkshire friends to the feast. One was a county hero, in great favour with Bell. The other was Mr. Anley, Jonah's godfather. He had a great affection for the family, and regularly dined with them upon grave crises and great occasions.

Lady Henley, being liberal in her hospitality, ordered in her viands and her champagne-bottles, and the girls went to Covent Garden and bought fruit and pineapples and autumn flowers to dress the table, and poor Jonah brought in a great baked pie from Gunter's.

"It's pâté-de-foie-gras," said he. "My father likes

it. I thought I might as well have it to celebrate the occasion." And he held it up triumphantly.

Poor Lady Henley had almost overrated her powers of endurance, for she looked into his honest sallow face, and then suddenly got up and rushed out of the room.

"Go to her, Jonah," said the girls, looking very pale.

Jonah came down after a little while with a very red nose, and then he went out again to buy something else. All day long he kept coming and going in cabs, bringing home one thing after another—a folding-chair, a stick to open out suddenly, a whole kitchen battery fitted into a tea-kettle, brooches for the girls, toys for his eldest sister's children. As for the contrivances, they served to make one evening pass a little less heavily, and amused them for the time, and gave them something to talk about. But soon after, all poor Jonah's possessions went down in the Black Sea, in an ill-fated ship, that foundered with far more precious freight on board than tin pans and folding-chairs.

Punctual to her time on the Friday, Lady Henley was there to receive her guests in her stiffest silks, laces, and jewels, looking like some battered fetish out of a shrine, as she sat at the head of the table.

Dolly came to dinner sorely against her will, but she was glad she had come when she saw how Jonah brightened up, and when the poor little wooden mother held up her face and kissed her.

Lady Henley said, "How do you do?" to her guests, but never spoke to any of them. It was a dreary feast. Robert failed at the last moment, and they sat down to a table with a gap where his place should have been. No one eat the pie except Sir Thomas, who swallowed a little bit with a gulp; then he called for champagne, and his face turned very red, and he looked hard at his son, and drank a long draught.

Jonah quickly filled his glass, and muttered something as he tossed it off. He had got his mother's hand under the table in his long bony fingers. Lady Henley was sitting staring fixedly before her. As Jonah drank their healths, Norah gave a little gasp. Mr. Anley took snuff. One of the country neighbours, young Mr. Jack Redmayne, whom Miss Bell used to meet striding, riding, and walking round about Smokethwaite, had begun a story about some celebrated mare; he paused for an instant, then suddenly rallying, went on and on with it, although nobody was listening, not even Miss Bell.

"I thought it best to go on talking," he said afterwards. "I hope they don't think it unfeeling. I'm sure I don't know what I said. I put my horse a dozen times over the same gate; even old Firefly wouldn't stand such treatment." So the dinner went on; the servants creaked about, and the candles burnt bright, but no one could rally, and Lady Henley was finally obliged to leave the table.

Immediately after dinner came old Sam with his cab, and Dolly and her mother got up to go.

"I cannot think what possessed Joanna to give that funeral-feast," said Mrs. Palmer, as they were putting on their cloaks.

"Hush, mamma," said Dolly, for Jonah was coming running and tumbling downstairs breathless from his mother's room.

"Look here, Dolly," he said: "mother wants you to come and see her to-morrow after I am gone, and don't let her worry too much, and would you please take this?" he said. "Please do."

This was a pretty little crystal watch that he had bought for her, and when Dolly hesitated and exclaimed, he added, entreatingly, "It is my wedding present. I thought in case we never—I mean that I should like to give it to you myself," he said.

"Oh! Jonah," Dolly answered in a low voice, "perhaps I may never want a wedding present."

"Never mind, keep it," said Jonah, staring at her hand, "and I'll look up George the first thing. You know my father has written to his colonel. Keep a good heart, Dolly; we are all in the same boat."

He stood watching the cab as it drove away under the stars.

Dolly was not thinking of Jonah any more. She was looking at all the passers-by, still hoping to see Robert.

"He ought to have come, mamma, this last night?" she said.

"My dear, do you ever expect a man to think of anything but his own convenience?" said Mrs. Palmer, with great emphasis.

"Oh! mamma, why must one ever say good-by?" said Dolly, going on with her own thoughts.

"I believe, even now he might persuade you to run off with him," said Mrs. Palmer, laughing. . . . .

It was over. He was gone. He had come and gone. Dolly had both dreaded and longed to be alone with Robert, but her mother had persistently stayed in the room. It was about four o'clock when he came, and Dolly left her aunt's bedside and came down to the summons, and stood for an instant at the drawing-room door. She could hear his voice within. She held the door-handle, as she stood dizzy and weary. She thought of the Henleys parting from their son, and envied them. Ah! how much easier to part where love is a certainty; and now this was the last time—and he was going, and she loved him, and she had sent him away, and he had never said one word of regret, nor promised once to come back.

She had offered to set him free; she had said she could not leave them all. At this moment, in her heart, Dolly felt as if she *could* have left them; and as if Robert, in going and in ceasing to love her, was taking away all the light and the strength of her life. He seemed to be making into a certainty that which she had never believed until now, and proving to her by his deeds that his words were true, although she

had refused to believe them. She had given him a heart out of her own tender heart, a soul out of her own loving imagination, and now where were her imaginations? Some dry blast seemed to her to be beating about the place, choking her parched throat and drying her tears. Her eyes were dull and heavy-lidded; her face looked pale and frightened as she opened the door and walked in. "Dolly is so strong," Mrs. Palmer was saying, "she has courage for us all. I do not fear for her."

"Perhaps it is best as it is," Henley answered a little hurriedly. "I shall go out solely with a view to making money, and come home all the sooner. It is certainly better not to disturb Lady Sarah with leave-takings."

He looked up and saw Dolly coming across the room, and was shocked by the girl's pale face.

"My dearest Dora," said Henley, going to meet her, "how ill you look; you would never have been fit for the journey."

"Perhaps not," said Dolly. She was quite passive, and let him hold her hand, but a cold shadow of bitterness seemed to have fallen upon her. It was a chilly August day. They had lit a small wood fire, and they now brought some coffee to warm Robert before he left. Robert was very much moved, for him.

He put down his coffee-cup untasted, and stood by the tall chimney looking down into the fire. Then he looked at his watch, and went up to his aunt and

said good-by, and then he came and stood opposite Dolly, who was by the window, and looked her steadily in the face. She could not look up, though she felt his eyes upon her, and he kissed her. "God bless you," he said, deserting his post with a prayer, as people do sometimes, and without looking back once, he walked out of the room.

Robert left the room. Dolly stood quite still where he had left her; she heard the servants' voices outside in the hall, the carriage starting off, some one calling after it, but the wheels rolled on. She stood dully looking through the window at some birds that were flying across the sky. There were cloud heaps sailing, and dead leaves blowing along the terrace, the bitter parching wind was still blowing. It was not so much the parting as the manner of it. She had thought it so simple to love and to be loved; she had never believed that a word would change him. Was it her fault? Had she been cold, unkind? She was very young still, she longed for one word of sympathy. She turned to her mother with a sudden impulse.

"Oh, mamma!" she said, piteously.

"I cannot think how you can have been so hard-hearted, Dolly," said her mother. "*I* could not have let him go alone. How long the time will seem, poor fellow! Yes, you have been very tyrannical, Dolly."

Was this all the comfort Mrs. Palmer had to give?

Something seemed choking in Dolly's throat; was it her hard heart that was weighing so heavily?

"Oh! mamma, what could I do?" she said. "I told him he was free: he knows that I love him, but indeed he is free."

Mrs. Palmer uttered an impatient exclamation. She had been wandering up and down the room. She stopped short.

"Free! what do you mean. You have never said one word to me. What *have* you been about? Do you mean that he may never come back to you?"

But Dolly scarcely heard her mother's words. The door had opened and some one came in. Never come back? This was Robert himself who was standing there. He had come to say one more farewell. He went straight up to her and he caught her in his arms. "There was just time," he said. "Good-by once more, dearest Dora!" It was but a moment; it was one of those moments that last for a lifetime. Dolly lived upon it for many a day to come. He loved her, she thought to herself, or he would never have come back to her, and if he loved her the parting had lost its sting.

CHAPTER XII.

I BRING YOU THREE LETTERS — I PRAY YOU READ ONE.

Nay, if you read this line, remember not the hand that writ it.

THE partings were over. Dolly lived upon that last farewell for many a day to come. Such moments are states, and not mere measures of life. Everything else was sad enough. Lady Sarah still lingered. Poor little Lady Henley in her home in Dean's Yard was yellow and silent, and fierce in her anxiety. What was it to her that Sebastopol was to fall before the victorious armies if the price she had to pay was the life of her son? She kept up as best she could, but the strain told upon her health and her temper. Sir Thomas kept meekly out of the way. The servants trembled and gave warning; the daughters could not give warning. Woe betide Norah if she were late for breakfast. Ill-fated Bell used to make *mal-àpropos* speeches, which were so sternly vented upon her that she used to go off in tears to her father. Sir Thomas himself was in an anxious, unsettled state, coming and going from his desk, poring over maps and papers, and the first of those awful broadsheets of fated names overcame him completely. He burnt the paper, and would not let it go upstairs; but how keep out the lurid gleam of Victory that was spreading over the

country? Her flaming sword hung over all their heads by one single thread; it was the life of one man against the whole campaign for many of them. Hoarse voices would come shouting and shrieking in the streets; there was but one thought in everybody's mind. All day long it seemed in the air, and a nightmare in the darkness. Poor Sir Thomas had no heart to go out, and used to sit gloomily in a little back study, with a wire blind, and four pairs of boots, and *The Times* and a blotted cheque-book; he determined at last to take his wife home to Yorkshire again. There at least some silence was to be found among the moors and the rocky ridges, and some seeming of peace.

But for a long time Lady Henley refused to go. She was nearer Jonah in London, she said. The post came in one day sooner. It must have brought news to many an anxious home. What letters they are, those letters written twenty years ago, with numbed fingers, in dark tents, on chill battle-fields, in hospital wards. All these correspondents are well and in good heart, according to their own accounts. They don't suffer much from their wounds; they don't mind the cold; they think of the dear people at home, and write to them after a weary night's watch, or a fierce encounter, in the gentlest words of loving remembrance. The dying man sends his love and a recommendation for some soldier's children or widow at home; the strong man is ready to meet his fate, and is full of compassion for suffering. "I am writing on

poor ——'s sabretache. I am keeping it for his brother at home," says one. Another has been to see his sick friend, and sends cheering accounts of his state. Then, too, we may read, if we choose, the hearty, ill-spelt correspondence of the common soldiers, all instinct with the same generous and simple spirit. There are also the proclamations of the generals. The French announce: "The hour is come to fight, to conquer, to triumph over the demoralised columns of the enemy. The enterprise is great and worthy of their heroism. Providence appears to be on their side, as well as an immense armament of guns and forces, and the high valour of their English allies and the chosen forces of the Ottoman Empire. The noble confidence of the generals is to pass into the souls of the soldiers." At the same time, as we read in the English correspondent's letter, Lord Raglan issues his memorandum, requesting Mr. Commissary-General Filder "to take steps to insure that the troops shall all be provided with a ration of porter for the next few days."

There is the record of it all in the old newspapers. Private Vance's letters are not given, for Dolly kept them for her own reading when they came at last. By the same mail came news from the two last departing travellers. Marker, who had brought in the letters one evening, waited in the doorway.

"George!" cried Dolly, tearing her first envelope open, and then half-laughing, half-crying, she read her letter out.

George seemed in good spirits. He wrote from Varna. A previous packet must have been lost, for he said he had written before. This was a cheerful and affectionate letter, quite matter-of-fact, and with no complaints or railings at fate.

"I daresay people think me a great fool," he said, "but, on the whole, I don't regret what I have done, except for any annoyance it may have caused you. If you and mamma would go to the Horse Guards and ask for a commission for me, perhaps two such pretty ladies might mollify the authorities. They say commissions are not difficult to get just now. I shall consult the colonel about it; I am to see him again in a day or two. I don't know why I did not speak to him just now when he sent for me." Then he went on to say that his Bulbul scholarship had stood him in good service, and his little Turkish had been turned to account. He had already passed as second-class interpreter, and he had got hold of some books and was getting on. "This is the reason why the Colonel sent for me yesterday morning. I am Private Vance, remember, only just out of the awkward squad. Our Colonel is a grand old man, with bright eagle eyes, and the heroic manner. He is like one of your favourite heroes. Do you remember Aunt Sarah's talking of David Fane, our father's old friend? When I found out who he was I felt very much inclined to tell him my real name. He said to me at once, 'I see you are not exactly what you appear to be. If you will come to me in a day or two I shall be glad

to talk to you about your prospects; in the meanwhile don't forget what a good influence one man of good education and feeling can exert in the ranks of a regiment.' Old Fane himself is no bad specimen of a true knight; we all feel the better for knowing him. He walks with a long swift stride like a deer, tossing his head as he goes. I have never seen him in battle, but I can imagine him leading his men to victory, and I am glad of the chance which has given me such a leader. I wish there were more like him. Tell Raban, if you see him, that I am getting on very well, and that, far from being a black sheep here, no lambskin can compare with my pipe-clay." Then came something erased. "Dearest Dolly, you don't know what your goodness has been to me all this time. I hope Robert appreciates his good luck. This will reach you about the time of your wedding-day. I will send you a little Russian belt when I can find an opportunity. My love to them all, and be kind to Rhoda, for the sake of your most affectionate

"G. V."

There waa a P.S.

"I forgot to ask you when I last wrote whether you got the letter I wrote you at Cambridge, and if old Miller gave you my packet. I bought the form in the town as I walked down to the boats; it all seems a horrid dream as I think of it now, and I am very much ashamed of that whole business; and yet I should like to leave matters as they are, dear, and to feel

that I have done my best for that poor little girl. My love to old John; tell him to write. There has been a good deal of sickness here, but the worst is over."

The paper trembled in Dolly's hand as she dwelt upon every crooked line and twist of the dear handwriting that wrote "George is safe."

"I told you all along it was absurd to make such a disturbance about him. You see he was enjoying himself with his common associates," said Mrs. Palmer crossly. "Strangely peculiar," she added after a moment. "Dolly, did it ever occur to you that the dear boy was a little——?" and she tapped her fair forehead significantly.

"He was only unhappy, mamma, but you see he is getting better now," said Dolly.

The next time Dolly saw Rhoda she ran up and kissed her, looking so kind that Rhoda was quite surprised and wondered what had happened to make Dolly so nice again.

CHAPTER XIII.

RACHEL.

Shepherd, what's love, I pray thee tell?
It is that fountain and that well
Where pleasure and repentance dwell;
It is perhaps that sauncing bell
That tolls all into heaven or hell.
And this is love as I heard tell.

It was not only in the hospitals at Varna that people were anxious and at work at the time when George wrote. While the English ships were embarking their stores and their companies, their horses and their battalions, transporting them through surf and through storm to the shores of the fierce Russian Empire; while Eastern hospitals were organising their wards, nurses preparing to start on their errand; while generals were sitting in council,—an enemy had attacked us at home in the very heart of our own great citadel and store place, and the peaceful warriors sent to combat this deadly foe are fighting their own battles. Cholera was the name of the enemy, and among those who had been expecting the onslaught, haranguing, driving companies of somewhat reluctant officials, good old John Morgan had been one of the most prominent. His own district at Kensington was well armed and prepared, but John Morgan's life at Kensington was coming to an end, and he had ac-

cepted a certain small living in the city called St. Mary Outh'gate, of which the rector was leaving after five or six years' hard work. "It is a case of bricks without straw," said the poor worn-out rector. Morgan was full of courage and ready to try his hand. Mrs. Morgan, with a sigh given to the old brown house and its comfortable cupboards, had agreed to move goods and chattels shortly into the dark little rectory in the City court, with its iron gates and its one smutty tree. To the curate's widow and mother there was an irresistible charm in the thought of a rectory.

St. Mary Outh'gate was a feeble saint, and unable to protect her votaries from the evil effects of some open sewers and fish-heaps when the cholera broke out—at John's request the move was delayed. The girls remained at Kensington, while Mrs. Morgan travelled backwards and forwards between the homes. Every day the accounts grew more and more serious, and in the month of September the mortality had reached its height.

John's new parish of St. Mary Outh'gate lies on the river side of a great thoroughfare, of which the stream of carts and wheels rolls by from sunrise until the stars set. The rectory-house stood within its iron gates, in a court at the end of a narrow passage. The back of the house looked into a cross lane leading to the river. The thoroughfare itself was squalid, crowded, bare; there was nothing picturesque about it; but in the side streets were great warehouse cranes starting from high windows, and here and there some relic of

past glories. Busy to-day had forgotten some old doorway perhaps, or left some garden or terrace-wall, or some old banqueting-room still standing. It had swept the guests into the neighbouring churchyards on its rapid way. To-day was in a fierce and reckless mood: at home and abroad were anxious people watching the times, others were too busy to be anxious. John was hard at work and untiring. He had scarcely had time to unpack his portmanteau and to put up his beloved books and reports. His start had been a dispiriting one. People had been dying by scores in the little lane at the back of the rectory. Mrs. Morgan herself fell ill of anxiety and worry, and had to go home. It must be confessed that the cares of the move and the capabilities of the drawing-room carpet added not a little to the poor lady's distress. Betty remained to take care of her master, and to give him her mind. John bore the old woman's scolding with great sweetness of temper. "You do your work, Betty, and let me do mine," said he. He had taken in two professional nurses after his mother left, and his curate, whose landlady had died of the prevailing epidemic. The two men worked with good will. John came, went, preached, fumed, wrote letters to *The Times*. Frank, who was in town, came to see him one day. He found the curate in good spirits. Things were beginning to look a little less dark, and John was one of those who made the best of chance lights. He received his friend heartily, wheeled his one arm-chair up for him, and lit a pipe in his honour. The two

sat talking in the old bare black room leading into the court. John gave a short account of his month's work.

"It's over now—at least, the worst is over," he said, "and the artisans are at work again. It's the poor little shopkeepers I pity, they have lost everything—health, savings, customers—they are quite done up. However, I have a friend in the neighbourhood to whom I go, and Lady Sarah heard of my letter to *The Times* and sent me fifty pounds for them the other day. Dolly brought it herself. I was sorry to see her looking worn, poor dear. I think it is a pity that Mrs. Palmer takes so very desponding a view of her daughter's prospects. Dolly seemed disinclined to speak on the subject, so I did not press her, and we all know," said the curate, in a constrained sort of voice, "that Henley is a high-minded man, his good judgment, and sense of . . . ."

"His own merit," said Raban, testily. "What a thing it is to have a sense of one's own virtue. He will get on in India, he will get on in every quarter of the world, he will go to heaven and be made an archangel. He has won a prize already that he does not know how to value at its worth, and never will as long as he lives."

John Morgan looked very much disturbed. "I am very sorry to hear you say this. Tell me as a friend, when Mrs. Palmer declares the engagement is broken off, do you really think there is any fear of . . . ."

Frank jumped up suddenly.

"Broken off!" he cried, trying to hide his face of supreme satisfaction, and he began walking up and down the room. "Does she say so?"

The dismal little room seemed suddenly illumined; the smoky court, the smutty-tree, the brown opposite foggy houses were radiant. Frank could not speak. His one thought was to see Dolly, to find out the truth; he hardly heard the rest of the curate's sentence. "I have been so busy," he was saying, "that I have scarcely had one minute to think about it all; but I love Dolly dearly, she is a noble creature, and I should heartily grieve to hear that anything had occurred to trouble her. Are you going already?"

There is a little well of fresh water in Kensington Gardens, sparkling among the trees, and dripping into a stone basin. A few stone steps lead down to the lion's head, from whence the slender stream drips drop by drop into the basin; the children and the birds, too, come and drink there. Somewhere near this well a fairy Prince was once supposed to hold his court. The glade is lovely in summer, and pleasant in autumn, especially late in the day, when the shadows are growing long, and the stems of the murmurous elm-trees shine with western gold.

Frank Raban was crossing from the high-road towards the Palace gate, and he was walking with a long shadow of his own, when he chanced to see a nymph standing by the railing and waiting while the stream trickled into the cup below. As he passed she looked

up, their eyes met, and Frank stopped short, for the nymph was that one of which he had been thinking as he came along—Dorothea of the pale face and waving bronze hair.

As he stopped Eliza came up the steps of the well, bringing her young mistress the glass; it was still very wet with the spray of the water, and Dolly, smiling, held it out to Raban, who took it with a bow from her hand. It was more than he had ever hoped, to meet her thus alone at the moment when he wanted to see her, to be greeted so kindly, so silently. No frowning Robert was in the background, only Eliza waiting with her rosy face, while Dolly stood placid in the sloping light in the sunset and the autumn. Her broad feathered hat was pushed back, her eyes were alight.

"I am so glad to see you," she said. "You have heard our good news from George; it came two nights ago. My aunt has been asking for you, Mr. Raban. What have you been doing all this time?"

"I have been at Cambridge," said Frank. "I am only up in town for two days; I was afraid of being in your way. Is everybody gone? Are you alone? How is Lady Sarah?"

"She is better, I think. I am going back to her now," said Dolly. "I came here with Eliza to get her some of this chalybeate water. Will you come with me part of the way home?"

Of course he would come. He was engaged to dine at the club, and his hosts never forgave him for

failing; he had letters to answer and they remained on the table. He had left John Morgan in a hurry, too much excited by the news he had heard to smoke out his pipe in tranquillity, but here was peace under the chestnut-trees where the two shadows were falling side by side and lengthening as the world heaved towards the night.

As they were walking along Frank began telling Dolly about a second letter he had received from his grandfather; he could never resist the wish to tell her all about himself; even if she did not care to hear, he liked to tell her.

"I am in an uncertain state of mind," he said. "Since I saw you my grandfather has taken me into favour again: after these seven years he offers me Leah. He wants me to give up driving young gentlemen and to take to sheep-shearing and farming and a good allowance. He writes to me from Harrogate. I should have a house and serve in bondage, and live upon him, and rescue him from the hands of the agents who now perform that office very effectually," said Raban, dryly.

"What do you mean?" said Dolly, looking at him doubtfully.

"This is what I mean," said Frank; "I cannot forget how badly the old people used me, and how for seven years they have left me to shift for myself. I have always failed in ambition. I shall never win Rachel," he said, "and I want nothing else that any-

body can give me; and what is the use of putting my head under the tyrannic old yoke?"

"It is so difficult to be just," Dolly answered, leading the way under the trees. "When I try to think of right and wrong it all seems to turn into people and what they wish and what I would like to do for them. I wonder if some people can love by rule? And yet love must be the best rule, mustn't it? and if your poor old grandfather is sorry and begs you to go to him, it seems cruel to refuse."

She seemed to be speaking in tune to some solemn strain of music which was floating in the air.

Frank was looking at the ground, and without raising his eyes he presently said,—"Well, I suppose you are right; I shall take your advice and give up the dry crust of liberty and try to be content with cakes and ale; such strong ale, Miss Vanborough, such heavy cakes," he added, looking at her absently.

Dolly blushed up, hesitated: she was rather frightened by the responsibility Frank seemed to put upon her.

"Could not you ask some one else?" she said, confusedly. "Perhaps Rachel," she added, not without a little jealous pang, lest Rachel might be Rhoda, and her poor boy's last chance undone.

The light seemed to come from Raban's dark eyes. "I *have* asked Rachel," he said, in a low voice that seemed to thrill clear and distinct on her ears. "Is it possible? do you not know it? Is not your

name Rachel to me? are you not the only Rachel in the whole world for me? I never thought I should tell you this," cried Frank, "until just now, when I heard from John Morgan that you were free; but now, whatever your answer may be, I tell you, that you may know that you are the one only woman whom I shall ever love. My dear, don't look frightened, don't turn away. Robert Henley never loved you as I do."

His coldness was gone; his half sarcastic, half sulky, careless manner was gone. It had given way to a sort of tender domination; the real generous fire of truth and unselfish love, that belonged to the man and had always been in him, seemed to flash out. The music still clanged on, solemnly jarring with his words. Dolly turned pale and cold.

"I am not free; it has all been a mistake," she said, very quickly. "You must not speak to me of Robert like that."

His face changed. "Are you still engaged to him?" he asked, looking at her steadily.

"I promised to wait for him, and you have no right to ask me anything at all," she cried, turning upon him. "Oh, why did you—how can you speak to me so?" She spoke vehemently, passionately.

He was silent; but she had answered his eyes, not his spoken words. He saw that her eyes were full of tears. He had read her too carefully to have had much hope. He saw that she was overpowered, that she was bound to Robert still, that his wild dream of

happiness was but a vision. It was no new revelation to him. "You might have guessed it all long ago," said he, shortly. "But you would not understand me before, when I tried to tell you that I loved you. Now you know all," he said, with a sigh. "Forget it if you like."

He would have left her, but Eliza had disappeared, and a crowd of people were gathered outside the gate, rough-looking Irish among them from the buildings opposite. A military funeral was passing by, the music had ceased, and the soldiers went tramping down the street in a long and solemn line; the slow fall of their feet struck upon the hard road and echoed with a dull throb. People were looking on in silence and crowding to the windows and in the doorways. As the dead man's horse was led by with the empty saddle and the boots swinging from the side, Dolly turned away pale and trembling, and Raban was glad then he had not left her. She put out her hand for a moment. She seemed blinded and scared.

Then she recovered herself quickly, and when the crowd gave way, she walked on in silence by his side until they came to the turning that led to the old house. "Thank you," she said, a little tremulously. "Forgive me if I spoke harshly; it was best to tell you the truth."

Raban had meant to leave her without a word: now he suddenly changed his mind. He held out his hand.

"Good-by, Rachel," he said, still looking at her with silent reproach. "Do not fear that I shall trouble and annoy you again; it would be hard to take your friendship and confidence away from me because of John Morgan's mistake."

"How can you be my friend?" cried poor Dolly suddenly, passionate and angry once more. "Leave me now—only go, please go."

Henley would have been satisfied if he had been present.

Frank walked away, bitterly hurt and wounded; she seemed to resent his love as if it had been an insult. He was disappointed in Dolly, in life; the light was gone out, that one flash of happiness had shown him his own disappointment all the more plainly. We don't hope, and yet our hearts sink with disappointment: we expect nothing, but that nothing overwhelms us. And meanwhile life is going on, and death, and the many interests and changes of mortals coming and going on their journey through space. When Frank got back to Cambridge he found a telegram summoning him at once to Harrogate. It was sent by some unknown person.

People part—each carries away so much of the other's life; very often the exchange is a hard-driven bargain, willingly paid indeed, which the poor debtor is in no inclination to resent:—a whole heart's fidelity and remembrance in sleepless nights, tendered prayers and blessings, and exchange for a little good grammar, a pleasant recollection, and some sand and ink and

paper, all of which Dolly duly received that evening. All day long she had been haunted by that little scene at the well; it seemed to bring her nearer to Henley, and his letter came as an answer to her thoughts. George's letter had been for them all. Robert's was for herself alone, and she took it up to her room to read.

Robert's letter was not very short: it was sufficiently stamped: it said all that had to be said; and yet, "How unreasonable I am! how can men feel as women do?" thought Dolly, kissing the letter to make up for her passing disappointment. Then came a thought, but she put it away with a sort of anger and indignation. She would not let herself think of Frank with pity or sympathy. It seemed disloyal to Robert to be sorry for the poor tutor.

Lady Henley also received a blotted scrawl from Jonah by that same post, and she made up her mind at last to go home, and she sent the brougham for Dolly and her mother to come and wish her good-by. On her first arrival Dolly was pounced upon by her cousins and taken in to Sir Thomas. When she came upstairs at last, she found her aunt and her mother in full committee, apparently on good terms, and with their heads close together. The little lady was upon the sofa. Mrs. Palmer was upon the floor, in a favourite attitude. There only could she find complete rest, she said. Lady Henley had a great heap of Jonah's clothes upon the sofa beside her; she had been folding them up and marking them with her

own hands. The drawing-room seemed full of the sound of the bells from the towers outside, and autumn leaves were dropping before the windows.

"Come here," said Lady Henley, holding out her hand to Dolly. "I have been talking to your mother about you. Look at her—as if there were no chairs in the room! I wanted to show you Jonah's letter. Foolish boy, he sends you his love! I don't know why I should give the message. You know you don't care for him, Dolly. Have you heard from Robert? Is he properly heart-broken?" with a sort of hoarse laugh. "Jonah mentions that he seems in very good spirits." Then Lady Henley became agitated. Dolly stood silent and embarrassed. "Why don't you answer," said her aunt, quite fiercely. "You can't answer; you can't show us his letter; you know in your heart that it has been a foolish affair. Your mother has told me all."

Lady Henley was flushed and getting more and more excited, and, at the same time, Philippa gave one of her silvery laughs, and starting actively to her feet, came and put her arm round Dolly's waist.

"All! no, indeed, Joanna. Delightful creature as he is, Robert tells one nothing. Forgive me, dearest, it is a fact. He really seemed quite to forget what was due to me, a lady in her own drawing-room, when he said good-by to you. I only mention it, for he is not generally so *empressé*, and if he had only explained himself——"

"What have you been saying, mamma?" said

Dolly, blushing painfully. "There is nothing to explain."

"There is everything to explain," burst in Lady Henley from her corner; "and if you were my own daughter, Dolly, I should think it my duty to remonstrate with you, and to tell you frankly what I have always said from the beginning. There never was the slightest chance of happiness in this entanglement for either of you; take the advice of an older woman than yourself. Robert has no more feeling for you than—than—a fish, or do you think he would consent to be free? Ah! if you were not so blinded. . . . There is one honest heart," she said, incoherently, breaking down for an instant. She quickly recovered, however, and Dolly, greatly distressed, stood looking at her, but she could not respond; if ever she had swerved, her faithful heart had now fully returned to its first allegiance. All they said seemed only to make her feel more and more how entirely her mind was made up.

"Robert and I understand each other quite well," said Dolly, gravely. "I wish him to be free. It is my doing, not his; please don't speak of this to me, or to any one else again."

She had promised to herself to be faithful, whatever came. Her whole heart had gone after Robert as he left her. She knew that she loved him. With all her humility, the thought that she had made a mistake in him had been painful beyond measure. It seemed to her now that she was answerable for his

faith, for his loyalty, and she eagerly grasped at every shadow of that which she hoped to find in him.

She walked away to the window to hide her own gathering tears. The bells had come to an end suddenly. Some children were playing in the middle of the road and pursuing one another, and a stray organman, seeing a lady at the window, pulled out his stop and struck up a dreary tune—"Partant pour la Syrie, le jeune et beau Dunois." It was the tune of those times, but Dolly could never hear it afterwards without a sickening dislike. Dolly, hearing the door bang, turned round at last.

"My dear Dolly, she is gone—she is in a passion—she will never forgive you," said Philippa, coming up in great excitement.

But she was mistaken. Lady Henley sent Dolly a little note that very evening:—

My Dear,—I was very angry with you to-day. Perhaps I was wrong to be angry. I will not say forgive an old woman for speaking the truth; it is only what you deserve. You must come and see us when you can in Yorkshire. We all feel you belong to us now.

Yours affectionately,

Joanna Henley.

P.S.—I see in this evening's paper that our poor old neighbours at Ravensrick died at Harrogate within a day of one another. I suppose your friend Frank Raban comes into the property.

CHAPTER XIV.

CRAGS AND FRESH AIR.

My prayers with this I used to charge :
A piece of land not very large,
Wherein there should a garden be ;
A clear spring flowing ceaselessly ;
And where, to crown the whole, there should
A patch be found of growing wood.
All this and more the gods have sent.

HORACE: T. MARTIN.

THE old town of Pebblesthwaite, in Yorkshire, slides down the side of a hill into the hollow. Rocks overtop the townhall, and birds flying from the crags can look straight down into the greystone streets, and upon the flat roofs of the squat houses. Pebblesthwaite lies in the heart of Craven,—a country little known, and not yet within the tramp of the feet of the legions. It is a district of fresh winds and rocky summits, of thymy hill-sides, and of a quaint and arid sweetness. The rocks, the birds, the fresh rush of the mountain streams as they dash over the stones, strike Southerners most curiously. We contrast this pleasant turmoil with the sleepy lap of our weed-laden waters, the dull tranquillity of our fertile plains. If we did not know that we are but a day's journey from our homes, we might well wonder and ask ourselves in what unknown country we are wandering. Strange-

shaped hills heave suddenly from the plains; others, rising and flowing tumultuously, line the horizon: overhead great clouds are advancing, heaped in massive lines against a blue and solid sky. These clouds rise with the gusts of a sudden wind that blows into Frank Raban's face as he comes jogging through the old town on his way to the house, from which he had been expelled seven years before, and to which he was now returning as master. Smokethwaite is the metropolis of Pebblesthwaite, near which is Ravensrick. The station is on a little branch line of rail, starting off from the main line towards these rocks and crags of Craven.

Frank had come down with the Henleys, and seen them all driving off in the carriages and carts that had come down to meet them from the Court. Nothing had come for him, and he had walked to the inn and ordered the trap.

"Where art goin'?" shouts a pair of leather-gaiters standing firm upon the doorstep of an old arched house opposite.

"Ravensrick Court," says the driver.

"'Tis a blustering day," says old leather-gaiters.

The driver cracks his whip, and begins to do the honours of Pebblesthwaite as the horse clatters over the stones. "Do ye ken t' shambles?" he says, pointing to an old arched building overtopped by a great crag.

"I know it as well as you do," says Frank, smiling.

Can it be seven years since he left? Raban looks about: every stone and every pane of glass seems familiar. The town was all busy and awake. The farmers, sturdy, crop-headed, with baskets on their arms, were chattering and selling, standing in groups, or coming in and out of shops and doorways, careful as any housewives over their purchases. There were strange stores—shoes, old iron, fish, all heaped together; seven years older than when the last market-day Frank was there, but none the worse for that. There was the old auctioneer, in his tall, battered hat, disposing of his treasures. He was holding up a horse's yoke to competition. "Three shillin'! four shillin'!" says he. The people crowd and gape round. One fellow, in a crimson waistcoat, driving past in a donkey-cart, stops short and stares hard at the trap and at Raban. Frank knew him, and nodded with a smile. Two more stumpy leather-gaiters, greeting each other, looked up as he drove by, and grinned. He remembered them too. There was the old Quaker, in his white neckcloth, standing at the door of his handsome old shop; and Squire Anley, walking along to the bank, all dressed from head to foot in loose grey clothes, with his bull-terrier at his heels. And then they drove out into the straight country roads, under the bridge between stone hedges, beyond which the late flames of summer green were still gleaming, —the meadows still shone with spangling autumn flowers. Far away in the hollow hung the smoke of the factory, with its many windows; a couple of tall

chimneys spouted blackness; a train was speeding northward; close at hand a stream was dashing; the great trees seemed full of birds. It was a different world from that in which he had been basking. Frank already felt years younger as he drove along the road, —the old boyish impulses seemed waiting at every turn. "Why, there goes old Brand," he cried, leaning forward eagerly to look after an old keeper, with a couple of dogs, walking off with a gun towards the hills.

Frank called after the keeper, but the wind carried away his voice. As he drove along by each stile and corner that seemed to have awaited his coming, he suddenly thought of his talk with Dorothea. She had been cruelly hard to him, but he was glad to think now that he had followed her advice about forgiveness of injuries, and made an advance to the poor old people who were now gone. It would have been absurd to pretend to any great sorrow for their death. They had lived their life and shown him little kindness while it lasted. It was a chance now that brought him back to Ravensrick again.

He had written an answer to his grandfather's letter and accepted his offer, but the only answer which ever came to this was the telegram summoning him to Harrogate. It had been delayed on the way; and as he went down in the train, the first thing he saw was a paragraph in *The Times*,—"At the Mitre Hotel, Harrogate, on the 28th instant, John Raban, Esq., of Ravensrick, Pebblesthwaite, aged 86; and on the

following day, Antonia, widow of the above John Raban, Esq., aged 75." The old squire had gone to Harrogate for the benefit of his health, but he had died quite suddenly; and the poor lady to whom he had left everything, notwithstanding his injunctions and elaborate directions as to her future disposal of it, sank the night after his death, unable to struggle through the dark hours.

And then came confusion, undertakers, lawyers, and agents, in the midst of which some one thought of sending for Frank. He was the old couple's one grandson, and the old lady had left no will. So the tutor came in for the savings of their long lives—the comfortable old house, the money in the bank, the money in the funds, the ox and the ass, and the man-servant and the maid-servant, who had had their own way for so many years past, and preyed upon the old couple with much fidelity. They all attended the funeral in new suits of mourning ordered by the agent. Frank recognised many of them. There was the old housekeeper who used to box his ears as a little boy; the butler who used to complain of him. He was oppressed by all these yards of black cloth and these dozens of white pocket-handkerchiefs; and he let them return alone to Ravensrick, and followed in the course of a day or two.

There are harsh words and unkind judgments in life, but what a might of nature, of oblivion and distraction is arrayed in battle against them; daylight, lamplight, sounds of birds and animals come in be-

tween, and turn the slander, the ill-spoken sentence and its fierce retort from its path. What do harsh words matter that were spoken a week ago? Seven days' sunshine have brightened since then. While I am railing at false friends and harsh interpretations, the clematis' flowers have starred the wavering curtain of green that shades my window from the light; the old Norman steeple has clanged the blue hours, the distant flow of the sea has reached me, with a sound of the twitter of birds in accompaniment. Is it six months ago since A. judged B. unkindly? A. and B., walking by the opal light of the distant horizon, are thinking no more of coldness and unkindness, but of the fresh sweetness of the autumnal sea.

As Frank comes driving along the well-known road, and the fresh blustering winds blow into his face, past unkindness matters little, every gust sends it farther away. He thinks, with a vague sense of pity, of a poor little ghost that used to run hiding and shrinking away in dark corners, a little fatalist doomed to break windows, slam doors, and leave gates ajar, through which accusing geese, sheep, ponies would straggle to convict him. He used to think they were all in one league against him. Twice a week on an average he was led up into his grandfather's study to be cross-examined and to criminate himself hopelessly before that inexorable old judge:—a handsome old man with flowing white locks and a grand manner and opinion upon every subject. If old Mrs. Raban generally supplied the opinions, the language was the

Squire's own. Mrs. Raban had been a spoiled old beauty, rouged and frizzed and rustling; she disliked every one who interfered with her own importance. She adored her husband, and was jealous of him to the last. Some chance speech had set her against the poor little "heir" as some one called him, and she had decreed that he was a naughty and stupid little boy and was to be kept in his place. There rises Frank's little doppelgänger before him, hanging his head, convicted of having broken the carriage-window, or some such offence; there sits the old judge in his arm-chair by the library-table, dignified, stately, uttering magnificent platitudes, to which the ancestor in the cauliflower wig is listening with deep attention. Frank seems to hear the echo of his voice and the rustle of his grandmother's dress as she leaves the room: but the horse starts, a partridge scuffles across the road, and he comes back to the present again.

"Yan goes," says the driver, excitedly, standing up on his box. Then they pass a little tumbledown village, and there at a turn of the road rise the chimneys of Ravensrick, and Pen-y-ghent rearing its huge back behind them, and the iron gates, and the old avenue, and the crows flying, whirling, dancing, sliding in twos and threes and twenties—how often the little doppelgänger had watched their mystic dance. Had it been going on for seven years?

"There's t' Court," said Frank's companion—a good-humoured, talkative man. "T' owd Squire, he were respectit, but he let things go." As he spoke

they were passing by a cottage with a broken roof and a generally dilapidated, half-patched look; a ragged woman was standing at the door, two wild-looking children were rolling in the dust; at the same time a man on horseback, coming the contrary way, rode past them on the road. The driver touched his cap, the woman disappeared into the house.

"That's Thomas Close, t' agent," said Frank's companion.

Frank, looking back as the carriage turned, saw a curious little scene. One of the children, who was standing in the road, suddenly stamped and clenched his little fist at the agent as he passed. The man reined in his horse, leant back, and cut at the child with his whip; the little boy, howling, ran into the cottage.

Frank asked the driver what he knew of the people in the cottage.

The man shrugged his shoulders. "Mary Styles she is queer in her ways," said he: "i' t' habit o' snuffin' and drinkin'. Joe Styles he follows t' Squire's cart; t' agent give him notice la-ast Monday—he wer' down at our ya-ard wantin' work, poor chap," said the man, with a crack of the whip. "Thomas Close he says he will have nought nor bachelors upon t' farm. He's a ——"

"Stop," said Frank: "I'll get down here: take my portmanteau to the front door and tell them to pay you, and say that—a—I am coming."

The man stared, and suddenly gave a low whistle

as he drove off. Meanwhile the new Squire walked up by the back way. He crossed the kitchen-garden and got on to the terrace. How well he knew the way; the lock of the gate was easier than it used to be—the walls were greener and thicker with leaves and trellis. The old couple were coming back no more, but the beds they had planted were bright with Michaelmas daisies and lilies, and crimson and golden berries with purple leaves were heaping the terrace, where a man was at work snipping at the overgrowth of the box hedges. There was the iron scrolled gate through which you could see the distant view of Pen-y-ghent. There was the old summer-house, where he once kept a ménagerie of snails, until they were discovered by Miss Meal, his grandmother's companion. Coming out of the garden he found himself face to face with the long rows of doors and of windows—those deadly enemies of his youth; a big brown dog, like a fox, with a soft skin and a friendly nose, came trotting up with a friendly expression. It followed Frank along the back passage leading straight into the hall: it was one of those huge stone halls such as people in Yorkshire like. The man in armour stood keeping watch in his corner—the lantern swung, every chair was in its place, and the old man's hat and his dogskin gloves lay ready for him on the oak table.

Then Frank opened the dining-room door. It faced westward, and the light came sliding upon the floors and walls and shining old mirrors, just as he remembered it. There was the doctor of divinity in his

gown and band, who used to make faces at him as he sat at luncheon; there was the King Charles's beauty, leaning her cheek upon her hand, and pensively contemplating the door and watching her descendants pass through. This one walks firm and quick; he does not come shuffling and with care; though give him but time enough, and it may come to that. But, meanwhile, the ancestry on canvas, the old chairs with their fat seats and slim bandy legs, the old spoons curling into Queen Anne scrolls, the books in the bookcases—all have passed out of the grasping old hands, and Frank, who had been denied twenty pounds often when he was in need, might help himself now, there was no one to oppose his right.

The next room is the library, and his heart beats a little as he opens the door. There is no one sitting there. The place is empty and in order; the chair is put against the wall; the oracle is silent; there is nothing to be afraid of any more.

Frank, as he stands in the torture chamber, makes a vow to remember his own youth, if, as time goes on, he should ever be tempted to be hard upon others. Then he walks across to the fireplace and rings the bell. It jangles long and loud; it startles all the respectable old servants, who are drinking hot beer, in their handsome mourning, in the housekeeper's room. Frank has to ring again before anybody finds courage to come.

Perrin, the butler, refusing to move, two of the housemaids appear at last, hand in hand. They peep

in at the door, and give a little shriek when they see the window open and Frank standing there. They are somewhat reassured when a very civil young master, with some odd resemblance to the old eagle-faced Squire, requests them to light a fire and show him to a room.

"I came in the back way," he said. "I am Mr. Raban."

Frank declines the Squire's room, the great four-post bedstead, and the mahogany splendour, and chooses a more modest apartment on the stairs, with a pretty view of the valley.

He came down to a somewhat terrible and solitary meal in the great dining-room; more than once he looked up at his ancestor, now too well-mannered to make faces at the heir. All that evening Frank was busy with Mr. Close. He said so little, and seemed so indifferent, that the agent began to think that another golden age was come, and that, with a little tact and patience, he might be able to rule the new Squire as completely as he had ruled the old one. Close was a vulgar, ambitious man, of a lower class than is usual in his profession. He had begun life as a house-agent. Most of the Squire's property consisted in houses; he had owned a whole street in Smokethwaite, as well as a couple of mills let out to tenants.

"I daresay you won't care to be troubled with all these details," said the agent, taking up his books as he said good-night.

"You may as well leave them," said Frank, sleepily.

"They will be quite safe if you leave them there, Mr. Close. I will just look them over once more."

And Mr. Close rather reluctantly put them down, and set out on his homeward walk.

It was very late. Frank threw open the window, when he was alone, and stood on the step looking into the cool blackness; hazy and peaceful, he could just distinguish the cows in the fields, just hear the rush of the torrent at the bridge down below. He could see the dewy, veiled flash of the lights overhead. From all this he turned away to Mr. Close's books again. Until late into the night he sat adding and calculating and comparing figures. He had taken a prejudice against the agent, but he wanted to be sure of the facts before he questioned him about their bearing. It was Frank's habit to be slow, and to take his time. About one o'clock, as he was thinking of going to bed, something came scratching at the window, which opened down to the ground. It was the brown dog Pixie, who came in, and springing up into the Squire's empty chair, went fast asleep. When Frank got up to go to bed, Pixie jumped down, shook himself, and trotted upstairs at his heels.

Frank took a walk early next morning. What he saw did not give him much satisfaction. He first went to the little farm near the bridge. He remembered it trim and well kept. Many a time he had come to the kitchen door and poured out his troubles to kind Mrs. Tanner, the farmer's wife. But the farmer's wife was dead, and the farm had lost its trim, bright look. The

flowers were in the garden, the torrent foamed, but the place looked forlorn; there was a bad smell from a drain; there was a gap in the paling, a general come-down-in-the-world look about the stables; and yet it was a pretty place, even in its present neglect. A stable-man was clanking about the yard, where some sheep were penned. A girl with gipsy eyes and a faded yellow dress stood at the kitchen-door. She made way for Frank to pass. Tanner himself, looking shrunken, oldened, and worn out, was smoking his pipe by the hearth. He had been out in the fields, and was come in to rest among his old tankards and blackened pipes.

Frank was disappointed by the old man's dull recognition. He stared at him and tapped his pipe.

"Ay, sir," he said, "I know you, why not? Joe Sturt from t' 'Ploo' told me you hed com.' Foalks com's and go's. T' owd Squire he's gone his way. He's com' oop again a young squire. T' owd farmer maybe will foller next. T' young farmer is a wa-aiting to step into his clogs."

Old Tanner turned a surly back upon Frank.

"Well, good-by," said the young landlord at last. "If Mrs. Tanner had been alive she would have been more friendly than you have been."

This plain-speaking seemed to suit the old farmer, who turned stiffly and looked over his shoulder.

"She wer' kind to all," said he; "even to gra-aspin' landlords that bring ruin on the farmer, and think nought o' doublin' t' rent. I wo-ant leave t' owd pla-ace," said Tanner. "Ye ca-ant turn me out. I

know ye would like to thraw it into t' pa-ark, but I'll pay t' la-ast farthin'. Close he wer' here again a-spyin', and he tould me ye had given him the lease. D—— him."

"Don't swear, Tanner," said Frank, laughing. "Who wants your farm? what is it all about?" And then it all came out. "There is some mistake; I will speak to Close," Frank said, walking off abruptly to hide his annoyance.

"T' cold-blooded fella," said old Tanner, settling down to his pipe again; but somehow it had a better flavour than before.

Close had not been prepared for Frank's early walk, and the new lease he was bringing for the new landlord to sign was already on its way to the Court. The old Squire had refused to turn Tanner out, but the lease was up, and year by year the agent had added to the rent. It was a pretty little place, capable of being made into a comfortable dwelling-house, where Mr. Close felt he could end his days in peace. Old Tanner was past his work, it was absurd of him to cling on. There had been a battle between the two, and poor old Tanner had been going to the wall.

Presently Frank forgot his indignation, for he met an old friend down the steep lane that led to the moor.

James Brand was a picturesque figure, advancing between the hedges this bright September morning. He had heavy gaiters, a gun was slung across his shoulders, and a lurcher was leaping at his heels. The old fellow was straight and active, with two blue eyes

like pools, and a face as seamed and furrowed as the rocks among which he lived.

"Thought ye wer' ne'er coomin', Mr. Frank," said he, quietly; "t' wife she sent me to look," and he held out a horny hand.

He was very quiet: he turned silently and led the way back to the little stone house built against the slope of the hill. The two trudged together: the keeper went a little ahead. Every now and then he looked over his shoulder with a glance of some satisfaction. Frank followed, stooping under the low doorway that led into the old familiar stone kitchen, with the long strings of oat-cake hanging to dry, its oak cupboard and deep window-sills, the great chimney, where Mrs. Brand was busied. Frank remembered everything: the guns slung on the walls, the framed almanack, the stuffed wild-fowl, the gleam of the mountain lake through the deep window, the face of his old nurse as she came to meet him. People who have been through trouble, and who have been absorbed in their own interests, sometimes feel ashamed when time goes on and they come back to some old home and discover what faithful remembrance has followed them all along, and love, to which, perhaps, they never gave a thought. If old things have a charm, old love and old friendship are like old wine with a special gentle savour of their own.

Frank had always remembered the Brands with kindness: once or twice at Christmas he had sent his old nurse a little remembrance, but that was all; he

had never done anything to deserve such affection as that which he read written upon her worn face. Her eyes were full of tears as she welcomed him. She said very little, but she took his hand and looked at him silently, and then almost immediately began to busy herself, bringing out oat-cake and wine from an oak chest that stood in the window.

"There is the old oak chest," said Frank, looking about; "why, nothing is changed, James!"

"We do-ant change," said James, looking about, with a silent sort of chuckle. Neither he, nor the old dame, nor the stout-built stone lodge were made to change. It was piled up with heavy stones; winter storms could not shake it, nor summer heats penetrate the stout walls.

This part of Craven country flows in strange and abrupt waves to the east and to the west. Rocks heap among the heather, winds come blowing across the moors, that lie grey and purple at mid-day, and stern and sweet in the evening and morning; rivers flow along their rocky beds, hawks fly past, eagles sometimes swoop down into this quaint world of stones and flowers.

Frank, standing at the door of the keeper's lodge, could look across to the court and to the hills beyond where the woods were waving; some natural feeling of exultation he may have felt, thinking that all this had come to him when he least expected it; well, he would do his best, and use it for the best; he thought of one person who might have told him what to do, with

whom, if fate had been propitious, he would gladly have shared these sweet moors and wild-flowers, these fresh winds and foaming torrents, but she had failed him, and sent him away with harsh words that haunted him still.

James, when they started again, brought him a light for his pipe, and the two trudged off together. James still went ahead. The dogs followed baying.

"So t' Squoire's in his grave," said James. "He were a good friend to us," he said. "I'm glad no strangers coom t' fore. Ye should a' cottoned oop t' old man, Mr. Frank."

"What could I do, James?" said Frank, after a moment's silence. "He forbade me the house. I am only here now by a chance. If there had been a will, I should probably have been far away."

"T'wer' no cha-ance," said old James. "He ne'er thought o' disinheritin' ye; he were a proud ma-an. T'wer' a moonth sin' I last saw t' ould man. He said, 'Wall! I'm a-going from Pebblesthwaite. Ye'll hav' another master, James, afore long; tell him t' thin the Walden wood, and tak' Mr. Fra-ank down t' hollow whar t' covers lie.' He took on sorely ne'er seeing ye, sir."

Frank turned very red. "I wish I had known it sooner, James."

Frank came home from his talk with his keeper in a softened and grateful mind. The thought that no injustice had been meant, that his grandfather had been thinking of him with kindness, touched him, and

made him ashamed of his long rancour. Now he could understand it all, for he felt that in himself were the germs of this same reticence and difficulty of expression. The letter he had thought so unkind had only meant kindness. It was too late now to regret what was past, and yet the thought of the dead man's goodwill made him happier than he could have supposed possible. The whole place looked different, more home-like, less bristling with the past; the lonely little ghost of his childhood was exorcised, and no longer haunted him at every turn.

Frank, notwithstanding his outward calm, was apt to go to extremes when roused, and, after a few mornings spent over accounts with Mr. Close, he gave that gentleman very plainly to understand that, although he did not choose to criticise what had passed, he wished his affairs to be conducted, in future, in an entirely different manner. The cottages were in a shameful state of disrepair; the rents were exorbitantly high for the accommodation given. . .

Mr. Close stared at Frank. The young Squire must be a little touched in the head. When Raban, carried away by his vexation, made him a little speech about the duties of a country gentleman and his agent, Mr. Close said, "Very true, sir. Indeed, sir? Jest so." But he did not understand one word of it, and Frank might just as well have addressed one of the fat oxen grazing in the field outside.

"You will find I have always studied your interests, sir," said Mr. Close, rubbing his hands, "and I shall

continue to do so. Perhaps you will allow me to point out that the proposed improvements will amount to more than you expect. You will have heavy expenses, sir. Some parties let their houses for a time: I have an offer from a wealthy gentleman from Manchester," said the irrepressible Close.

Frank shortly answered that he did not wish to let the house, and that he must arrange for the improvements. A domestic revolution was the consequence, for when the new master proposed to reduce the establishment, the butler gasped, choked, and finally burst into tears. He could not allow such aspersions upon his character. What would his old master and mistress have said? His little savings were earned by faithful service, and sooner than see two under-footmen dismissed, he should wish to leave.

Mrs. Roper, the housekeeper, also felt that the time was come for rest and a private bar. She had been used to three in the kitchen, and she should not be doing her duty by herself if she said she could do with less.

Raban let them all go, with a couple of years' wages. For the present he only wanted to be left alone. He stayed on with a groom and a couple of countrywomen sent in by Mrs. Brand. They clattered about the great kitchen, and their red shock heads might be seen half a mile off. Of course the neighbours talked: some few approved; old friends who had known him before troubled themselves but little; the rest loudly blamed his proceedings. He was a

screw: he had lived on a crust, and he now grudged every halfpenny. He was cracked (this was Mr. Close's version); he had been in a lunatic asylum; he had murdered his first wife.

When the county began to call in friendly basket-carriages and waggonettes, it would be shown in by Betty and Becky to the library and the adjoining room, in which Mr. Raban lived. Frank had brought the lurcher away from the keeper's lodge; it had made friends with the foxy terrier, and the two dogs would follow him about, or lie comfortably on the rug while he sat at work upon his papers. The periwigged ancestor looked on from the wall, indifferently watching all these changes. One table in the window was piled with business papers, leases, cheque-books, lawyers' letters in bundles. A quantity of books that Frank had sent for from London stood in rows upon the floor. After the amenities and regularities of the last few years, this easy life came as a rest and reinvigoration. He did not want society. Frank was so taken up with schemes for sweeping clean with his new broom, that he was glad to be free for a time, and absolved from the necessity of dressing, of going out to dinner, and making conversation. He would open his windows wide on starry nights. The thymy wind would sough into his face; clear beam the solemn lights; the woods shiver softly. Does a thought come to him at such times of a sick woman in an old house far away, of a girl with dark brows and a tender smile, watching by her bedside?

People who had been used to the pale and silent college tutor in his stuff-gown, might scarcely have recognised Frank riding about from farm to farm in the new and prosperous character of a country gentleman, be-gaitered and be-wideawaked. The neighbours who exclaimed at the shabbiness of Mr. Frank's indoor establishment might also, and with more reason, exclaim at the regiment of barrows and men at work, at the drains digging, roofs repairing, fences painting. The melancholy outside, tumble-down looking houses were smartening up. The people stood at their doors watching with some interest and excitement the works as they hammered on.

Frank superintended it all himself. He was up to his waist in a ditch one day when the Henley party drove past in the break on their way to call at Ravensrick. They left a heap of cards—Sir Thomas and Lady Henley, Mr. Jonah Anley, Captain Boswarrick —and an invitation for him to dine and sleep the following day. The red-headed girls took the cards in, and grinned at the fine company; the fine company grinned in return at Sukey.

"Why, what sort of society can he have been used to?" cried little Mrs. Boswarrick. She was the eldest daughter: a pretty, plump little woman, very much spoilt by her husband, and by her father, too, whose favourite she was.

"He has evidently not been used to associate with butlers and footmen," said Mr. Anley.

"Hulloh!" shouted Sir Thomas, as he drove out at

the park-gates. "Look there, Anley! he is draining Medmere, and there is a new window to the schools. By Jove!"

"Foolish young man!" said Mr. Anley, "wasting his substance, draining cottages and lighting school-rooms!" and he looked out with some interest.

"Then, Uncle Jonah, you are foolish yourself," said Bell.

"Are you turned philanthropist, Uncle Jonah?" said Mrs. Boswarrick. "I wish some one would take me and Alfred up. What have you been doing?"

"I make it a rule never to do anything at the time that can be put off till the morrow," said Mr. Anley, apologetically. "My cottages were tumbling down, my dear, so I was obliged to prop them up."

"He bought them from papa," said Bell. "I can't think why."

"It is all very well for bachelors like you and Raban to amuse yourselves with rebuilding," said Sir Thomas, joining in from his box in an aggravated tone; "if you were a married man, Anley, with a wife and daughters and milliners' bills, you would see how much was left at the end of the year for improvements."

"To hear them talk, one oughtn't to exist at all," says Mrs. Boswarrick, with a laugh.

CHAPTER XV.

WHITE WITH GAZING.

The tender heart beat no more; it was to have no more pangs, no more doubts, no more griefs and trials: its last throb was love!

PENDENNIS.

The Harbingers are come: see, see their mark!
White is their colour. . . .

G. HERBERT.

FRANK accepted Lady Henley's invitation and arrived at Henley Court just before dinner-time one day. The place lies beyond Pebblesthwaite, on the Smokethwaite road. It was a more cheerful house than Ravensrick—a comfortable, modern stone-piled house, built upon a hill, with windows north and south, and east and west, with wide distant views of valleys and winding roads and moors. Through one break of the hills, when the wind blew south, the chimneys of Smokethwaite stood out clear against the sky; at other times a dull black cloud hung over the gap. The garden was charming: on one side a natural terrace overhung the valley; a copper beech rustled upon the lawn; and a few great chestnut-trees gave shade in summer to the young people of the house, to the cows browsing in the meadow, who would come up to the boundary fence to watch Miss Bell's flirtations with gentle curiosity, or the children at play, or

to listen to Sir Thomas reading out the newspaper. He had a loud voice and a secret longing for parliamentary distinction. When he read the speeches he would round his periods, address Lady Henley as "sir," and imagine himself in his place, a senator in the company of senators. He was a stupid man, but hospitable, and popular in the neighbourhood, far more so than Lady Henley, who was greatly disliked. Bell was fast, handsome. Norah was a gentle, scatter-brained creature, who looked up to everybody; she especially adored her sister, Mrs. Boswarrick, who had captivated Captain Boswarrick one evening at a York ball, where she had danced down a whole regiment of officers. The captain himself was a small and languid man, and he admired energy in others. If Sir Thomas was fond of thundering out the debates, Captain Boswarrick had a pretty turn for amateur acting and reciting to select audiences. Some one once suggested private theatricals.

"Never while I live," said Lady Henley, "shall there be such mummeries in this house. If Alfred chooses to make a fool of himself and repeat verses to the girls, I have no objection, so long as he don't ask me to sit by."

"I never should have thought of asking you to sit by, Lady Henley," drawled Alfred.

When Frank was announced, he found the young ladies in fits of laughter, Captain Boswarrick declaiming in the middle of the room, with Squire Anley and Mr. Redmayne for audience. Everybody turned round,

and the performance suddenly ceased when he entered. The Squire nodded without getting up.

"How d'ye do?" said Mrs. Boswarrick, holding out half-a-dozen bracelets. "Mr. Raban forgets me, I can see. Sit down. Alfred hates being interrupted. Go on, Alfred!"

Captain Boswarrick's manner would quite change when he began to recite. He would stamp, start, gesticulate, and throw himself into the part with more spirit than could have been reasonably expected.

And now, with a glance at his wife, he began again with a stamp, and suddenly pointing—

That morn owd York wor all alive
Wi' leal an' merry hearts;
For t' country foalks com' i' full drive
I' gigs an' market-carts,
An' girt lang trains, wi' whistlin' din,
Com' w-w-whirrlin' up.

The little captain, suiting the action to the word, raised his arm with some action to represent the train. It was caught from behind by a firm grasp. Frank had not seen that he had been followed into the room by a stout little man in bran-new clothes, who joined the circle.

"Take care," said the stranger,—he spoke with a slight Yorkshire accent. "What are you about, yo'ng man? What is all this? Very fascinating, very brilliant, very seductive, very much so, but leading to—what?" with a sudden drop of the voice, and the hand he held. Bell went off into a shriek of laughter.

Captain Boswarrick flushed up. He might have

resented the interruption still more if he had not been somewhat mollified by the string of compliments.

"Leading to —— You would have heard all about it, Mr. Stock, if you had not stopped him," said Mr. Anley.

"Shall I make my meaning plainer?" said the little man, not heeding the interruption. "Shall I tell you what I mean? Social intercourse, music, poetry,—dazzling, I own. I, too, have experienced the charm; I, too, have studied to please; but I have also discovered the vanity of vanities; so will you one day. A fact, though you don't believe me."

"But in the meanwhile, Mr. Stock, don't grudge us our fun," said Bessie Boswarrick, coming to the rescue.

"I don't grudge it; far from it," said the stranger; "I was just like you all once; now—I am not afraid of ridicule—I can give you something better than that; better than that, better than that. You can choose between us: *his* poetry, *my* plain speaking. I'm a plain man,—a very plain man; he, brilliant, highly educated."

Captain Boswarrick scarcely knew how to accept all these compliments and in what sense to take them. Mr. Anley listened with the profoundest gravity. Bell giggled and stuffed her handkerchief into her mouth; but everybody was glad when the door opened and Lady Henley came in, making a diversion. The scene was getting embarrassing.

"After dinner, dear Mr. Stock," said Joanna, cour-

teously, "we shall be glad to hear *anything* you may have to say. Let us leave them to their folly, Mr. Raban. Do you know your neighbour?—our excellent friend and minister?"

Frank was quite prepared to make Mr. Stock's acquaintance—he was an amateur preacher, a retired cavalry officer, living not far from Ravensrick—but he found himself carried off by Sir Thomas. The baronet had been in town that week, and was in a communicative mood. He had seen the ladies at Church House, who had asked after Raban. The Admiral had been heard of from Gibraltar.

"He has been writing in the most ill-judged way to know the exact state of affairs between Dolly and my nephew Robert," Sir Thomas said confidentially. Sir Thomas always reflected the people with whom he had been living. "I found my sister greatly overcome —hers is a nervous susceptibility, almost amounting to genius, but *not* under control." And then, dropping his oratorical tone of voice, he went on to say that they all seemed much disturbed and greatly in want of cheering; that he had promised to run up again. "Lady Sarah still lingering, poor thing," he added. "She has a most devoted nurse in my young niece."

Frank asked as indifferently as he could how Miss Vanborough was looking.

"Not so blooming as I could wish," said Sir Thomas. "Far from it. My wife is anxious that our friend, Mr. Stock, should impart some of his admirable

ministration to her, but we cannot expect her to leave home at present."

Mr. Stock's ministration seemed to have won over the simple baronet, whose conversation was deeply interesting to Frank, for he went on alternately praising Mr. Stock and talking about Dolly. Sir Thomas was not the discreetest of men. "I had a—some painful explanation with my niece," he continued, lowering his voice (people seem to think that is a sort of charm against indiscretion); "to you, who are such an old friend, I may safely say that I do *not* like this vagueness and uncertainty in a matter which so closely concerns Dolly's happiness. The engagement seems to be neither on nor off. . . . She tells me that Robert is free, but she seems to consider herself bound. . . . I have thought it best to write to him plainly on the subject. . . . My wife, as you know, wishes the engagement entirely broken . . . at least I think so. . . ."

The baronet suddenly stopped short, and looking rather foolish, began to talk of Mr. Stock again.

Lady Henley was not so absorbed in her conversation that she had not overheard Sir Thomas's too candid confidences. She was shaking her head at her husband over her shoulder.

Frank moved away, and went and stared through one of the windows. Once more hope came to dazzle him. In some moods people grasp at faintest dreams. There was everything smiling, shining, every ridge seemed illuminated; there lay the happy valley flooded

with sunlight, life, brightness. Children's voices reached him, and meanwhile the recitation had begun again. "Yan morn in May," the Captain was saying. But a loud dinner-bell brought it all to a close.

The sun had set, they had all done dinner. Norah used to feed the cows of an evening with oat-cake prepared for Sir Thomas, and she now came out into the twilight, calling to her favourites, who stood expecting with their horns rearing against a golden streak. One bolder than the rest was making a hissing noise to attract attention, as Norah came out with her oat-cake. She called her favourites by name and softly stroked their long noses over the railings. Mr. Redmayne followed soon after, advancing with some precaution.

"Miss Norah," he said, "Mr. Stock is putting the drawing-room chairs in order—he evidently expects a large congregation. A Miss M'Grudder has come. Is it absolutely necessary that one should be present, or may one stop here and feed the cows?"

"I must go in," said Norah, demurely. "Here is the oat-cake, Mr. Redmayne," and so saying she put the remains into his hand and tripped hastily away.

Mr. Redmayne, however, preferred to follow Miss Norah. Frank came out as the two went in together —he did not want to be present at the oration. He was distracted and thinking of many things.

Those few words of Sir Thomas had given him a strange longing to go back, if only for a day, to see

Dolly again. He thought of his old friend also lying stricken. He had been very forgetful all these days past, and his conscience reproached him, and his inclination spoke too. There was an early train from Smokethwaite—he had business in town; why should he not go? Cruel girl! was she sad, and could he do nothing to help her?

As Frank walked up and down in the twilight, he would hear the boom of Mr. Stock's voice through the open drawing-room windows. When they started a hymn, the cows, who are fond of music, all crowded up to listen. As for Frank, he was in charity with all men, and prepared to believe that all that people did was good. If Mr. Stock liked to give a peculiar expression to the faith which was in him, Raban for one had no mind to quarrel with it. His own was a silent belief: it seemed growing with happier emotions that were overflooding his heart, but it found its best expression in silence. He took leave of his hosts that evening when he went upstairs to bed.

The servant had put Frank into Jonah's room. It was a mistake—and Lady Henley did not know of it. There were the poor boy's pistols, his whips, on the wall boxing-gloves and foils. He had somehow got hold of one of those photographs of Dolly of which mention has been made, and hung it up over his chimney. There were a few books on the shelf, Captain Mayne Reid, *Ivanhoe*, a few old school-books and poetry-books, and Frank took one down. Frank thought very kindly of poor Jonah as he looked about

at his possessions. He was a long time before he could get to sleep, and he got up and lighted his candle and read one of the books off the shelf—it happened to be Kingsley's *Andromeda*—till he fell asleep. Then it was only to dream a confused dream: Jonah fighting desperately with some finny monster, like that one on Lady Sarah's tiles, Dolly chained to a rock, and calling for help, while Mrs. Palmer and the Admiral stood wringing their hands on the shore. Was this George coming to their help? The monster changed to mist, out of which came lightning and thunder—the lightning was the gleam of a sword. The thunder shook the air; the mists parted; George, pale and wounded, stretched out his hand and gave Raban the sword; he looked weary with the fight; Frank in his dream rushed forward and struck wildly; the monster gave a horrible scream. He started up wide awake. He had left his window open; the morning mist had filled the room, but the scream was a real one; it was in his ears still. It came from the room below; there was a stir of voices, then all was silent again.

When Frank came down to an early breakfast in the big dining-room he asked the butler if any one had been ill in the night. "I heard a scream," he said.

"It is my lady in her sleep," the man answered. "She often do scream at night since Mr. Jonah left."

"I want my man called," said Frank; "I am going to town by the early train."

As Frank was changing carriages at one of the stations, the London train went by, and he thought he saw a glimpse of a familiar face; a grey kid glove was waved. Surely it was Mrs. Palmer, on her way to Henley Court!

From DOROTHEA VANBOROUGH *to* ROBERT HENLEY, ESQ., *Calcutta.*

I HAVE been hoping for a chance letter, but none has come since that last one from Alexandria. Aunt Sarah is asleep; the house is empty, and I am writing to you in the oak-room by the window. Dear Robert, what shall I say in answer to your letter? That I *do* trust you; that I do know how to love you, and that you in turn must trust me. I could almost scold you for what you say about Mr. Raban if I did not think that you are only unfair because you love me. I never see him now. He is in Yorkshire; so is mamma—she is gone for a couple of days. As for me, I cannot leave Aunt Sarah, who depends upon me more and more. I had a long talk with my uncle before he left. He asked me a great many questions about you. He tells me he has written. I do not know what he has written; but please send him a nice letter. Dear Robert, it is so painful to me to be cross-questioned about your affection for me. I must speak honestly and without disguise to you of all people in the whole world, and so I will confess that if I had known all——

Dolly, who had written thus far, looked up, for old Sam came into the room with a card.

"It's Mr. Raban, Miss," said he.

Dolly blushed up crimson. "I—I can't see him, Sam," she answered. "Aunt Sarah is asleep. Say I am engaged."

Sam came back with Frank's card. "Mr. Raban is in town till Monday, Miss."

"Put down the card, Sam," said Dolly, and she bent her head over her letter and went on writing.

Frank walked away disappointed. "She might have spared five minutes to a friend who had come a hundred miles to see her," he said to John Morgan that evening, as they walked back together to Frank's

hotel. The waiter met Frank with a note, which had been left during his absence.

Raban suddenly brightened up; he read a few words, very stiff, very shy. "Lady Sarah heard he had called, and wanted to see him; would he come the following day at five o'clock?" It was signed, "Yours truly, Dorothea Vanborough."

"Well," said John Morgan, "that is Dolly's writing, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Frank. "Lady Sarah wants to see me. As for Miss Vanborough, she seems to be studying the art of keeping old friends at a distance."

"Nonsense," said Morgan, "since she asks you to go. What is the matter with you?"

The second time old Sam let Frank in at once, and showed him into the drawing-room. "My lady will be ready directly," he said.

Frank waited his summons; when he was tired of waiting he stepped out upon the terrace, attracted by the beauty of the autumnal evening, and wondering what inexpressible charm the old home had for him. Ravensrick, with all the graces of possession, did not seem to him so much like home as this silent old house where he had no right, no single stake; where the mistress lay stricken, and parting from this world; where Dolly lived, but where her heart's interest was not. Already strangers were speculating upon the fate of the old house, and wondering who would come there after Lady Sarah's death. And yet Frank Raban, as he paced the terrace, felt a tranquil satisfaction

and sense of completeness that existed for him in no other place.

When Dolly came into Lady Sarah's room to tell her that Frank was there, Marker, who had been sitting in a corner, got up gently and left the room. Lady Sarah was not asleep; she was sitting up on her sofa by the window, of which the sash was half raised to let in the air. Her grey hair was hanging loose; grey though it was, it fell in shining silver curls about the withered face.

"Is that you, Dolly? I have had a dream," she said, a little wildly. "Your father was standing by me and we were looking at a river, and George was a child again, and I held him in my arms, and when I looked into his face it was like the face of that Raphael child at Dresden. Look out," she said, beginning to wander again, "and tell me if the river is there."

Dolly unconsciously obeyed, and looked out at the garden, in its shifting, changing lights and tremulous tones of radiance and golden-sombres. She could almost have imagined her aunt's dream to be true if Frank Raban had not been walking on the terrace. She looked back.

"Dear Aunt Sarah, it is the sunset that made you dream."

"It was a dream," said Lady Sarah, "but I think I have sometimes seen that river before, Dolly. Christian and Christiana and all the company have crossed it." Then, smiling: "I am afraid I have been a tire-

some old pilgrim at times." She pushed back her grey hair and lay looking into the girl's face. "It is nearly over now," she said.

Dolly tried to speak, but some sudden tears seemed to choke her, and Lady Sarah stroked her hand.

"Try to be a thankful woman, Dolly," she said. "God has blessed you and given you love and trust in others. I see now where I failed." Then, in her usual tone, she said, "I should like to see Frank Raban again."

Dolly was beginning to say that she would go for him, when Lady Sarah suddenly cried,—"Open the window wide! open! let the river come in."

Dolly, frightened, threw open the pane, and, as she did so, some evening bell began to ring from a distant chapel, and a great flight of birds passed across the sky.

The next minute Frank from the terrace below heard a cry. It was Dolly calling for help.

"I am here," he answered, and, without waiting to think, he sprang up the old oak staircase, and hurried along the passage to the door of Lady Sarah's room.

It was all dark in the passage, but the sun was in the room. Dolly was holding up her aunt in her arms; her strength seemed to be failing. Frank sprang to help her, and together they raised her up. A little soft breeze came in at the window, and Lady Sarah opened her eyes. She was still wandering.

"Is this George?" she said. "I have been waiting for you, dear."

Then she seemed to recognise Frank, and she let her hand fall upon his sleeve.

"Ah! he will take care of Dolly," she whispered, "for this is ——"

A quick silent brightness came into her face: it may have been some change in the sunset lights. She was dead—lying in a serene and royal peace.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT AUNT SARAH LEFT FOR DOLLY.

. . . One that was a woman, sir;
But, rest her soul—she's dead!

SHAKSPEARE.

FOR an hour Frank kept watch alone in the empty rooms below. The doctor had come and gone. He said, as they knew he would, that all was over, there was nothing more to be done for Sarah Francis.

Frank had been for the doctor. He had sent a telegram to Mrs. Palmer; then he came back and waited below in the twilight room, out of which the mistress was gone for ever.

When death enters a house there is a moment's silence; then comes the silent tumult that follows death, everybody scared and bustling to the door, acquaintances leave their own names on bits of pasteboard, friends write notes, relations encamp in the dining-room, the pale faces of the living come and look at the place out of which a life has passed away. Servants come and go, busy with the fussy paraphernalia. It means kindness and honour to the dead, but it seems all contrived to make sorrow grotesque and horrible instead of only sorrowful.

When the rush of strangers and of neighbours

came, it pushed in between Frank and the solemn silence up above. "How had he come there?" they asked him. "What had the doctor said?" "How old was Lady Sarah?" "Was it known how things were left?" Then Frank heard Mrs. Morgan sending out for black-edged paper in a whisper, and he started up and left them, for it all jarred upon him and he could bear it no longer.

He went up and stood for a minute at the door of the room where he had left Dolly in her first burst of grief. At the moment the door opened softly, and Marker came out. Frank turned away, but in that instant he saw it all again. The light had passed away, but some stars were shining through a mist, and Dolly was kneeling in the silver shadow, with a pale upturned face.

There was no sound. As Frank walked away he thought of two peaceful faces in that upper chamber. Death might be in that room, but sorrow waited abashed for a time in the presence of the Peace of Peace.

Alas! though Dolly's friend was faithful and strong, and would gladly have saved her from all sorrow and wiped all tears from her eyes, it was in vain he wished her good wishes; poor Dolly's cup that day was filled to the very brim with a draught more bitter than she knew of as she knelt in that silent room.

The sun had set upon a day long to be remembered, when a great victory was won. Since mid-day the guns had been thundering along the heights, the

waters of the Alma were crimson in the sunset. The long day was over now, the heights were won, the dreadful guns were silent; but all that night men were awake and at work upon the battle-field, sailors from the fleet and others bringing help to the wounded, carrying them to the shore, and burying the dead.

* * * * *

They laid Lady Sarah in her grave one quiet autumn day, and came away silently. The blinds were drawn up when they got back to Church House, all the windows were open, the people who had not loved her came and went freely now; it struck Dolly strangely to hear Mrs. Palmer calling Julie over the stairs. There was a little water-colour of Lady Sarah in her youth, with a dislocated arm and a harp, that George and Dolly had often laughed over together. Now, as she took it down from the niche by the window in the oak-room, a sudden burst of longing tears came raining over her hands and the glass, dimming the simpering lady in water-colours. Dolly felt at that minute how much she would have given to have had a fuller explanation with her aunt. A complete clearing up between them had never come in words, and yet the look of Lady Sarah's tender eyes following her about the room, the clasp of that silent hand seemed to say, "I understand, I trust you," more plainly than words. "I have done as you wished," she had said. Was George forgiven too?

And now at least there were no more hidden

things between them, and all was peace in that troubled life. It seemed hard to Dolly at this parting time to be separated from the two she most loved—from Robert and from George—who would have shared her grief. Her long watch had told upon her strength and spirits; every sound made her start, and seemed the harbinger of bad news. She had a longing fancy, of which John Morgan told Frank one day: she wanted to go off to the East, to be allowed to nurse her brother on the spot, and she would learn as others had done if need be. John Morgan spoke of a friend, Mrs. Fane, who had a home for training nurses; would he not take her there one day? John Morgan agreed to take Dolly to Mrs. Fane's if she wished it. He was glad to do anything she told him, but as for her scheme, they were all opposed to it. She was not strong enough to bear much fatigue. And so, as the kindest people do, they condemned her to ease, to rest of body, to wearing trouble of mind.

"We should have her laid up, sir, if we let her go," said John Morgan; "and she is a good girl, and has promised to wait patiently until she hears from George. Robert, I am sure, would greatly disapprove of such a plan."

"I have been thinking of going to the East myself," said Frank, who had made up his mind for about two seconds. "Some men I know are taking out stores in a yacht, and want me to join them. If you see Miss Vanborough—I never see her—will

you tell her I am going, and will find out her brother . . .?"

"You had better tell her yourself," said John Morgan. "I am sure she would like to know it from you." Frank only shook his head.

Frank Raban used to come to Church House every day; he saw Sir Thomas, who had come up; he saw Mrs. Palmer; but, except once, he never saw Dolly. Sometimes he could hear her step turn at the door, once he saw her black dress as she walked away. One day, having gone upstairs, summoned by Mrs. Palmer, he looked through a window and caught sight of Dolly in the distance, sitting wrapped in a shawl, on the bench at the garden-end, alone, by the pond where she and George used to go together. She knew Raban was in the house. She waited there until he was gone.

What strange feeling was it that made her avoid Frank Raban of all the people that came to the house? Was she not generous enough to forget what had passed that day by the fountain?

"You are quite cold, my dear child," said her mother, when Dolly came in pale and shivering. 'Why did you not come in before?"

She had asked herself that very question that day. It was one she could not answer. It was no want of trust in him, no want of gratitude for his kindness, that made her unkind. This much she told herself. She acted by an instinct, and she was right to follow it. She belonged to Robert. She had deliberately

given him her word, her love, her trust. It was not a half fidelity, a half love that she had promised, and she would be true to her word and to herself. Only it seemed to be her fate, and to come round again and again in her life, short as it was, that what she loved should be at variance with what she felt; that, loving truth, and longing for one simple and uncomplicated response and sympathy, she found herself hesitating, fearing to look forward, living from day to day with a secret consciousness of something that she would not face.

This was the saddest time of Dolly's life. Brighter days were to come; hours that she had not yet dreamt of were in store for her; but the present was cold and drear: and though chill winds of spring help to ripen a heart for happiness in later life as well as the warm summer rays, Dolly could not know this yet.

One thing remained to be done. It interested no one less than those principally concerned. Lady Sarah's will was to be read; and Frank received a note from Mr. Tapeall, inviting him to come to Church House at a certain time. To-day, thanks to the lawyer's letter, he met Dolly at last. She was coming downstairs as he was crossing the hall. Her black dress made her look older, more stately. She seemed to him to change every time he met her now; and yet when she spoke she was herself again. She smiled a little, gave him her hand. She seemed inclined to say something, but she stopped short, and walked on

into the drawing-room, where the others were already waiting. The Morgans were there, and Rhoda, all sitting silently round the room.

It was a dull and dismal afternoon: the rain splashed, the sky came down in gray, vaporous glooms; the red tape was the most cheerful thing in the room. Mr. Tapeall sat untying his parcels at the table; Sir Thomas, with a silver pencil-case and crossed legs, was prepared to listen attentively, and make notes, if necessary. Mr. Tapeall looked round. "We are all here," he said, drawing in his chair. "It is unfortunate that Admiral Palmer should not have been able to arrive in time."

As Mr. Tapeall looked round, Mrs. Palmer replied, with a languid shrug, "We are used to do without him, Mr. Tapeall. I had proposed that he should meet me at Paris, but of course he makes his usual difficulties. What a climate!" she said. "Just look at the atmosphere! And yet the Admiral wishes to keep us in this dreadful country!"

"Dear Philippa, this is not the moment. If you will kindly listen to our excellent—to Mr. Tapeall," Sir Thomas began, in his oratorical voice.

Mrs. Palmer put on the resigned air, and murmured something about the climate, with an expressive glance at the window; Dolly sat listening, looking down, and quite silent; Frank thought of the first time he had seen her sitting by the fire. Mr. Tapeall began. "Lady Sarah had intended to execute a more formal document, which I have had prepared from

the memorandum in my possession," said he, "of which I will, with your permission, at once proceed to read the contents."

And so in the silence, by Mr. Tapeall's voice, Sarah Francis spoke for the last time in a strange jargon that in her lifetime she had never used. Her house at Kensington, in the county of Middlesex; her house in Yorkshire, in the parish of Pebblesthwaite; all other her messuages, tenements; all her personal property, monies invested in Government or landed securities, her foreign bonds, &c. &c., she left to her nephew, George Francis Vanborough, of All Saints' College, Cambridge. If he should die without issue or a will, it was to revert to Dorothea Jane Vanborough, of Church House, in the parish of Kensington, to whom she left her blessing, and, at the said Dorothea's own wish, nothing but the picture in the dining-room, as a token of affection, confidence, and most loving remembrance, and her trinkets. There were also legacies:—250*l.* to the Rev. John Morgan; 275*l.* to Frank Raban, Esq.; and, to Philippa's utter amazement and surprise, the sum of 5,000*l.* to Philippa, the wife of Admiral Hawtry Palmer, which was to revert to Dolly at her mother's death. There were legacies to Marker and old Sam. Mr. Tapeall and Frank Raban were appointed trustees and executors.

"But the will is not signed," said Sir Thomas, making a note.

"The memorandum is signed and attested," said

Mr. Tapeall. "Lady Sarah had proposed making me sole trustee, but to that I objected; she then suggested Mr. Raban. Each person present seemed going on with a separate train of thought, as I ventured to point out to her ladyship."

"I *quite* understand," said Dolly, starting up and looking suddenly bright and beaming. "I am so glad," she said, and her eyes filled with tears.

"My dear child, we deeply feel for you," said Mrs. Morgan, stepping forward with a heavy foot.

Raban too glanced rather anxiously; but he was reassured: there was no mistaking the look of relief and content in the girl's face. It was as if her aunt had spoken; a sign to Dolly that she had forgiven the past; and George must come home now, he must be happy now; all was as she wished, his long disgrace was over; she clasped her two hands together.

Mr. Tapeall continued—"The whole thing has been complicated by previous trusts and claims, making it desirable that the estate should be administered by a business man. This was Lady Sarah's reason for making me trustee," said Mr. Tapeall. "For the present my co-trustee's presence will not be necessary," and he politely bowed to Frank Raban.

"Thomas, did you hear? 5,000*l.*!" cried Mrs. Palmer. "The poor dear extraordinary old thing must have lost her head. Why, we *detested* each other. However, it is quite right; yes, it would have been a thousand pities to dwell upon trifles. As for my poor Dolly, I must say I do not at all see why George is

to have all those things and Dolly nothing at all. Dolly, what *will* Robert say, poor fellow? *How* disappointing. Come here, dearest, and let me give you a kiss."

Dolly smiled as she bent over her mother. "I did not want it, mamma; you will let me live with you." And then, as she raised her head, her eyes met Raban's anxious glance with a frank smiling answer.

Rhoda sat perfectly bewildered and amazed. Was George heir after all? Was this a part that Dolly was acting? Everything to George. Rhoda began to think vaguely that there was George's chair, his carpet, his four walls, and there might have been her carpet, her chair. It might have been hers. Her head seemed going round; she was in a rage with herself, with her Aunt Morgan, with everybody. As for Dolly, she did not know about poverty. How admiringly Mr. Raban had looked at her. How strangely Dolly was behaving. After all, thought Rhoda enviously, hearing Mrs. Palmer chatter on to Mr. Tapeall, Dolly would be cared for.

"Certainly, winter abroad," Mrs. Palmer was saying. "I require change and rest and a warmer clime, Mr. Raban. You must bring George back to us at Paris. So you really go to-morrow! What a curious sum she has left you; really the poor dear seems peculiar to the last. How much did you say, Mr. Tapeall—5,000*l.*—is it only 200*l.* a year?"

"Mr. Vanborough should be communicated with

at once," said Mr. Tapeall. "I presume he has left no instructions?"

Mrs. Palmer here began shaking her head emphatically. "He had nothing to leave," she cried. "Nonsense, Dolly: that paper you have is nothing at all. Yes, Mr. Raban, we must meet at Paris," she continued, changing the subject, "when you come back, as you say, to see to poor Sarah's affairs. It is, however, quite enough that I should be attached to any one or any thing ——"

"Philippa," said Sir Thomas, coming up with a note he had just made, "Tapeall wishes to know something more about this paper of George's. Do you know anything of it?"

"Oh! you may tell Tapeall to burn it," said Mrs. Palmer, indifferently. "It is nothing."

"I think it is a will, mamma," said Dolly, steadily. "I will give it to Mr. Tapeall, and he can judge." And she left the room to fetch the paper.

"You know nothing of business, my dear Philippa," said the baronet, with a grim smile. "Tapeall must not burn wills that are sent to him to keep."

"Shall I ask him to give it back to me?" said Mrs. Palmer, rapidly, in a low voice. "It is only some whim of the boy's. He could not know of poor Sarah's extraordinary arrangements, putting everything out. How childish of Dolly to have spoken of the paper to Tapeall. Pray don't make so much noise with your fingers," for the baronet, who had many

restless little tricks, was drubbing the table energetically.

Frank came up to take leave, and no more was said at the time. He was to be away for two months, and meanwhile Mr. Tapeall had promised to act for him.

Mrs. Palmer was very much annoyed with Dolly. She treated her with great coldness, and, to show her displeasure, invited Rhoda to come out with her for a drive every day. As they went along she used to ask Rhoda a great many inconsistent questions, which Rhoda could not in the least understand. Rhoda wondered what she meant.

One day they drove to Gray's Inn. Mrs. Palmer said she liked to explore odd nooks. Then she had a chance idea, and stopped the carriage at Mr. Tapeall's office, and went up to see him. She came down smiling, flushed, and yet almost affectionate in her manner to the grim, bald-headed lawyer, who followed her to the door.

"Do as you like, dear Mr. Tapeall. As a mother, I should have treasured the memorandum. Of course, your scruples do you the greatest credit. Good-morning."

"A complete fool, my dear," said she, with a sudden change of manner to Rhoda, as the carriage drove off; "and as for your friend Dolly, she has not common sense."

"Would he not do what you wanted?" said Rhoda,

wonderingly. "What a stupid, tiresome man. But oh, Mrs. Palmer, I'm afraid he heard what you said."

"I do not care if he did. He would do nothing but bob his vulgar bald head," cried Mrs. Palmer, more and more irate. "Coachman, drive to Hyde Park Gardens; coachman, go to Marshall and Snellgrove's. I suppose, Rhoda, you would not know your way home from here on foot?" said Mrs. Palmer, very crossly. "Of course I must take you back, but it is quite out of the way. What is that they are crying in the street? It ought to be forbidden. Those wretched creatures make one quite nervous."

As Rhoda waited at the shop door, she heard them still crying the news; but two people passing by said, "It is nothing. There is no news;" and she paid no more heed to the voices. But this time there was truth in the lying voices. News had come, and the terrible details of the battle were all in the paper next day.

Sir Thomas came to the house early, before any one was up, and carried off the papers, desiring the servants to let no one in until his return. He came back in a couple of hours, looking fagged and wearied. He heard with dismay that Dolly had gone out. Mrs. Palmer was still in her room. Terrible news had come, and words failed him to tell it.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SORROWFUL MESSAGE.

I have no wealth of grief; no sobs, no tears,
Nor any sighs, no words, no overflow,
Nor storms of passion; no reliefs; yet oh!
I have a leaden grief, and with it fears
Lest they who think there's nought where nought appears
May say I never loved him.

HON. MRS. KNOX.

DOLLY was with John Morgan. At that minute they were coming up the steps at the end of a narrow street near the Temple. The steps led up from the river, and came from under an archway. The morning was fine, and the walk had brought some colour into Dolly's pale cheeks as she came up, emerging from the gloom of the arch. John thought he had not seen her look so like herself for a long time past. Dolly liked the quaint old street, the steps, the river beyond, the alternate life and sleep of these old City places.

As they came along, John Morgan had been telling Dolly something that had touched her and made her forget for a time the sad preoccupations from which she found it so difficult to escape. He had been confiding in her—George had known the story he told her—no one else. It was a melancholy, middle-aged episode of Mrs. Carbury's faithlessness. "She had

waited so long," said poor John, "and with so much goodness, that it has, I confess, been a blow to me to find that her patience could ever come to an end. I can't wonder at it, but it has been a disappointment. She is Mrs. Philcox now. Philcox is a doctor at Brighton. . . . It is all over now," said John, slowly, "but I was glad to leave Kensington at the time."

"I am so sorry and so glad, too, for she could not have been at all worthy of you," cried Dolly, sympathising. "Of course, she ought to have waited. People who love don't count time."

"Hush, my dear girl," said John. "She was far too good for me, and I was a selfish fool to hope to keep her. How could I expect her to wait for me? What man has a right to waste a woman's life in uncertainty?"

"Why, I am waiting for Robert," said Dolly.

John muttered uncomfortably that that was different. "Robert is a very different person to me," said John. "This is the house."

"What a nice old house," said Dolly. "I should like to live here for a little." John rang at the bell. It was a door with a handsomely carved lintel, over which a few odd bow-windows were built out to get gleams of the river. There was a blank wall, too, leading to the arch; the steady stream of traffic dinned in the distance of the misty street end.

Mrs. Fane lived in one of the streets that lead out of the Strand. At one time she had worked for the

Sisters of St. James, who lived not far off; but when, for various reasons, she ceased to become an active member of the community, she set up a little house of refuge, to which the Sisters often sent their convalescents. She had a sick kitchen for people who were leaving the hospitals, weak still and unfit for their work: mutton-chops and words of encouragement were dealt out to them; a ground-floor room had been fitted up as a reading-room, in which she gave weekly banquets of strong congou and dripping-cake, such as her guests approved. She was a clever, original-minded woman; she had once thought of being a Sister, but life by rule had become intolerable to her, and she had gone her own way, and set to work to discover a clue of her own in the labyrinth in which people go wandering in pursuit of the good intentions which are said to lead to a dreary terminus. London itself may be paved with good intentions for all we know. Who shall say what her stones might cry out if they had voices. But there they lie cold and hard and silent, except for the monotonous roll of the wheels passing on from suburbs to markets, to docks, and to warehouses, those cities within a city.

Charlotte Fane's clue in the labyrinth was a gift for other people's happiness, and a sympathy that no sorrow could ever over-darken. She had not been beautiful in her youth, but now in her middle age all her life seemed written in her kind face, in the clear brown eyes, in the gentle rectitude of her understanding sympathy. Some human beings speak to

us unconsciously of trust and hope, as others, in their inner discordance, seem to jar and live out before our very eyes our own secret doubts and failings, and half-acknowledged fears.

I have a friend, a philosopher, who thinks more justly than most philosophers. The other day when he said, "To be good is such a tremendous piece of luck," we all laughed, but there was truth in his words, and I fear this luck of being born good, does not belong to all the people in my little history. John Morgan is good. His soul and his big body are at peace, and evenly balanced. Everything is intensely clear to him. The present is present, the past is past. Present the troubles and the hopes of the people among whom he is living; past the injuries and disappointments, the failures and grievances of his lot; once over they are immediately put away and forgotten. Charlotte Fane's instincts were higher and keener, perhaps, than the curate's, but she, too, was born in harmony with sweet and noble things.

"Yes," said Morgan, "I come here whenever I want help and good advice. There are a few sick people upstairs that I visit. Mrs. Fane will show you her little hospital. Two of her nurses have just gone out to the East. She has been nursing some cholera patients with great success. I sent a letter to *The Times* on the subject; I don't know if they have put it in; I have not seen the paper to-day." As he spoke, there came a sudden, deep, melodious sound.

"That is Big Ben," said John. "Three-quarters.

We are late." The strokes fell one by one and filled the air and echoed down the street; they seemed to sound above the noise and the hurry of the day.

Dolly remembered afterwards how a man with an organ had come to the end of the street and had begun playing that tune of Queen Hortense's as they went into the house. The door was opened by a smiling-looking girl in a blue dress with some stiff white coiffe and a big apron.

"Mrs. Fane expected them; she would be down directly; would Mr. Morgan go up and speak to her first? Mrs. Connor was dying they feared. Would the lady wait in the nurses' sitting-room?" The little maid opened the door into a back room looking on to a terrace, beyond which the river flowed. There was a bookcase in the room: some green plants were growing in the window, a photograph hung over the chimney of one of Mr. Royal's pictures. Dolly knew it again, that silent figure, that angel that ruled the world; she had come face to face with the solemn face since she had looked at the picture two years ago in the painter's studio. Seeing it brought back that day very vividly—the young men's talk in the green walk: how Rhoda startled her when she came from behind the tree. The clocks were still going on telling out the hour one by one and ringing it out with prosy reiteration, some barges were sailing up the river, some children were at play, and the drone of that organ reached her occasionally; so did the dull sound of voices in the room overhead. She saw

two more white caps pass the window. She had waited some minutes, when she saw a paper lying on a chair, and Dolly, remembering John's letter to *The Times*, took it up and looked to see if it had been inserted. The letter was almost the first thing she saw, and she read it through quietly. It was signed "Clericus," and advocated a certain treatment for cholera. Long afterwards she talked it over quite calmly; then she turned the page. A quarter of an hour had passed by, for the clock in the room had begun to strike twelve. Did it strike into her brain? Did the fatal words come with a shriek from the paper? What was this? For a minute she sat stunned, staring at the printed words—then she knew that she had known it all along, that she never had had hope not for one instant since he left them. For one minute only she could not believe that harm had happened to him, and that was the minute when she read a list printed in pitiless order—"Killed on the 20th of September; wounded at the battle of the Alma; died on the following day of wounds received in action, Captain Errington Daubigney, Lieutenant Alexander Thorpe, —th Regiment, Ensign George Francis Vanborough. . ." There were other names following, but she could read no more. No one heard her cry, "My George, oh, my George!" but when the door opened and two nurses came in quietly in their white coiffes and blue dresses, they found a poor black heap lying upon the floor in the sunlight.

* * * * *

I heard a sailor only the other day telling some women of his watch on the night of the Alma, and how he had worked on with some of the men from his ship, and as they went he searched for the face of a comrade who came from his own native town. "His friends lived next door to us," said Captain B——, "and I had promised his mother to look after him. I could hear nothing of the poor fellow. They said he was dead, and his name was in the papers; and they were all in mourning for him at home, when he walked in one day long after. They found it harder to tell his mother that he was alive than that he was dead." Alas! many a tender heart at home had been struck that day by a deadly aim from those fatal heights for whom no such happy shock was in store.

"If it had not been for George," Jonah afterwards wrote to his mother, "you would never have seen me again."

On that deadly slope, as they struggled up through the deadly storm of which "the hail lashed the waters below into foam," Jonah fell, wounded in the leg, and as he fell the bugles sounded, and he was left alone and surrounded. A Russian came up to cut him down. He had time to see the muzzle of a gun deliberately aimed. Jonah himself could hardly tell what happened. Suddenly some soldier, springing from behind, fired, and the gun went up, and Jonah was able to struggle to his feet. He saw his new ally run one man through with his bayonet, and then, with his clenched fist, strike down a third who had

come to close quarters. It was a gallant rescue. When a moment came to breathe again Jonah turned. "Thank you, my man," he gasped. The man looked at him and smiled. Jonah's nerves were sharpened, for even in that instant he recognised George dressed in his private's dress: his cap had gone, and he was bare-headed.

As Jonah exclaimed, he was carried on by a sudden rush from behind; he looked back, and he thought he saw George leap forward and fall. It was a sudden rally—a desperate push—men fell right and left. The Colonel, too, was down a few paces off, and then came a blinding crash. Jonah himself was knocked over a second time by a spent shell. When he came to himself, he was being carried to the rear, and the tide of battle had swept on.

That night, while Dolly was at home watching in the mourning house, two men were searching along a slope beyond a vineyard, where a fierce encounter had taken place. A village not far off had been burned to the ground; there were shreds and wrecks of the encounter lying all about. Some sailors came up with lanterns and asked the men what they were doing.

"They were looking for a man of their own corps. The Colonel had been making inquiry," said the two soldiers. A reward had been offered—it was to be doubled if they brought him in alive.

"A gentleman run away from his friends," said one of the men. "There is an officer in the Guards

has offered the money; he's wounded himself, and been carried to the shore."

"Do you take money for it?" said one of the sailors, turning away, and then he knelt down and raised some one in his arms, and turned his lantern upon the face.

It was that of a young fellow, who might have seemed asleep at first. He had been shot through the temple in some close encounter. There was no mark except a dull red spot where the bullet had entered. He had been lying on his back on the slope, with his feet towards the sea; his brows were knit, but his mouth was smiling.

"Why, that's him, poor fellow?" said Corporal Smith, kneeling down and speaking below his breath. "So he's dead: so much the worse for him, and for us too—twenty pound is twenty pound."

"Here is a letter to his sweetheart," said one of the sailors, laying the head gently down, and holding out a letter that had fallen from the dead man's belt.

"Miss Vanbur — Vanborough; that's the name," said Smith.

The sailors had moved on with their lanterns: they had but little time to give to the dead in their search for the living; and then the soldiers, too, trudged back to the camp.

All that night George lay still under the stars, with a strange look of Dolly's own steadfast face that was not there in life. It was nobler than hers now,

tear-stained and sorrowing, in the old house at home. Afterwards, looking back, it seemed some comfort to Dolly to remember how that night of mourning had been spent, not discordantly separated from her George whom she had loved, but with him in spirit.

All that night George lay still under the stars. In the morning, just at sunrise, they laid him in his grave. A breeze blew up from the sea in the soldiers' faces, and they could hear the echo of some music that the French were playing on the heights. Some regiment was changing quarters, and the band was playing "Partant pour la Syrie," and the music from the heights swelled over the valley. Then the armies passed on to fresh battle, leaving the soldiers who had fallen lying along the valley and by the sea.

Jonah, on board ship, heard a rumour that George had been found desperately wounded, but alive. When he came back to the camp he found, to his bitter disappointment, that it was but a vain hope. George's name was on the list of the officers who had died of their wounds on the day after the battle. That unlucky reward had made nothing but confusion. Smith and his companion declared they had found him alive and sent him to the shore to be taken on board. He must have died on the way, they said. Jonah paid the twenty pounds without demur when the men came to claim it. The letter they brought made their story seem true. Jonah asked them a few questions. "Did he send me this letter for his sister?" he said: "was he able to speak?"

Jonah was choking something down as he tried to speak quietly.

"He sent his duty, sir," said Smith, "and gave me the letter. He said we should meet in a better world."

"Did he use those words?" said Jonah, doubtfully. Something in the man's tone seemed odd to him.

Smith gained courage as he went on. "He couldn't speak much, poor gentleman. Joe can tell you as well as me. He said, 'Smith, you are a good fellow,' says he, didn't he, Joe?"

Joe did not like being appealed to, and stopped Smith short. "Come along," he said, gruffly, "the Captain don't want you now."

Jonah let them go. He was giddy and weak from illness, and overcome. He began to cry, poor fellow, and he did not want them to see it; he walked up and down, struggling with his grief. His was a simple, grateful heart.

Colonel Fane, too, saw the men, who had gained confidence, and whose story seemed probable: they said nothing of the money that Jonah had offered. Poor George's commission had come only the day before the battle. Colonel Fane sent his name home with the list of the officers who had fallen. He thought of the sweet-looking girl, his old friend's daughter, and remembered their talk together. His heart ached for her as he wrote her a few words of remembrance and feeling for her sorrow. His praise of George was Dolly's best comfort at that miserable time, and the few words he enclosed written by her brother on the very morning of the battle.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FROM HEART OF VERY HEART.

Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of,
Where I hush and bless myself with silence.

R. BROWNING.

IT was as well perhaps that the cruel news should have come to Dolly as it did, suddenly, without the torture of apprehension, of sympathy. She knew the worst now, she had seen it printed for all the world to read; she knew the worst even while they carried her upstairs half conscious; some one said "higher up," and then came another flight, and she was laid on a bed and a window was opened, and a flapping handkerchief that she seemed to remember came dabbing on her face. It was evening when she awoke, sinking into life. She was lying on a little bed like her own, but it was not her own room. It was a room with a curious cross corner and a window with white curtains, through which the evening lights were still shining. There was a shaded green lamp in a closet opening out of the room, in the corner of which a figure was sitting at work with a coiffe like that one she had seen pass the window as she waited in the room down below.

A low sob brought the watcher to Dolly's side.

She came up carrying the little shaded lamp. Dolly saw in its light the face of a sweet-looking woman that seemed strangely familiar. She said, "Lie still, my dear child. I will get you some food," and in a few minutes she came back with a cup of broth, which she held to her lips, for to her surprise Dolly found that her hands were trembling so that she could not hold the cup herself.

"You must use my hands," said the lady, smiling. "I am Mrs. Fane. You know my brother David. I am a nurse by trade."

And nursed by these gentle hands, watched by these kind eyes, the days went by. Dolly "had narrowly escaped a nervous fever," the doctor said. "She must be kept perfectly quiet; she could not have come to a better place to be taken care of."

Mrs. Fane reminded Dolly one day of their first meeting in Mr. Royal's studio. "I have been expecting you," she said, with a smile. "We seem to belong to each other."

Marker came, and was installed in the inner closet. One day Mrs. Palmer came bursting in with much agitation and many tears; she had one grand piece of news. "The Admiral was come," she said; "he should come and see Dolly before long;" but Mrs. Palmer's visit did the girl no good, and at a hint from Mrs. Fane, the Admiral also kept away. He left many parcels and friendly messages. They were all full of sympathy and kindness, and came many times a day to the door of the nurses' home. But Mrs. Fane was

firm, and after that one visit from Mrs. Palmer she kept everyone out, otherwise they would all have wished to sit by Dolly's bed all day long. The kindness of leaving people alone is one which warm-hearted people find least easy to practise; and, in truth, the best quiet and completest rest comes with a sense of kindness waiting, of friends at hand when the time is come for them.

One evening, when Dolly was lying half asleep, dreaming of a dream of her waking hours, a heavy step came to the door, some one knocked, and when Marker opened with a hush! a gruff voice asked how Dolly was, and grumbled something else, and then the step went stumping down to the sitting-room below. When Dolly asked who had knocked, Marker said, "It was only an old man with a parcel, my dear. I soon sent him off," she added, complacently.

Dolly was disappointed when Mrs. Fane, coming in, in the morning, told her that the Admiral had called the night before. He had left a message. He would not disturb the invalid. He had come to say that he was ordered off to Ireland on a special mission. He had brought some more guava jelly and tins of turtle soup, also a parcel of tracts, called "The Sinners' Cabinet." He told Mrs. Fane that he was taking Mrs. Palmer into Yorkshire, for he did not like leaving her alone. He also brought a note for Dolly. It was a hurried scrawl from Philippa:—

Church House, October 30.

DARLING,—My heart is torn. I am off to-morrow morning by cock-crow, *of course*, travelling in the same train, but in a *different carriage*, with my

husband. This is his arrangement, not mine, for he knows that I cannot and will not submit to those odious fumes of tobacco. Dearest, how gladly would I have watched by your pillow for hours had Mrs. Fane permitted the mother that one sad privilege; but she is trained in a sterner school than I. And, since I must not be with you, come to me without delay. They expect you—your room is prepared. My brother will come for you at a moment's notice. You will find Thomas a far pleasanter travelling companion than Joanna (with whom you are threatened). *Do not hesitate between them.* As for the Admiral, he, as usual, wishes to arrange everything for everybody. Opposition is useless until he is gone. And heaven knows I have little strength wherewith to resist just now.

There was a P.S.

You may as well get that memorandum back from Tapeall if you can.

Dolly was not used to expect very much from her mother. Mrs. Fane was relieved to find that she was not hurt by Mrs. Palmer's departure; but this seemed to her, perhaps, saddest of all, and telling the saddest story. Her mother had sent Dolly baskets of flowers, Mrs. Morgan called constantly with prescriptions of the greatest value. Mrs. Fane had more faith in her own beef-tea than in other people's prescriptions. She used to come in to see her patient several times a day. Sometimes she was on her way to the hospital in her long cloak and veiled bonnet. She would tell Dolly many stories of the poor people in their own homes. At certain hours of the day there would be voices and a trampling of feet on the stairs outside.

"It is some more of them nurses," said Marker, peeping out cautiously. "White caps and aprons—that's what this institootion seems to be kep' for."

Marker had an objection to institootions. "Let people keep themselves to theirselves," she used to

say. She could not bear to have Dolly ill in this strange house, with its silence and stiff orderly ways. She would gladly have carried her home if she could, but it was better for Dolly to be away from all the sad scenes of the last few months. Here she was resting with her grief—it seemed to lie still for a while. So the hours passed. She would listen with a vague curiosity to the murmur of voices, to the tramp of the feet outside; bells struck from the steeples round about, high in the air and melodiously ringing; Big Ben would come swelling over the housetops: the river brought the sound to Dolly's open window.

Clouds are in the sky, a great heavy bank is rising westward. Yellow lights fall fitfully upon the water, upon the barges floating past, the steamers, the boats; the great spanning bridge and the distant towers are confused and softened by a silver autumnal haze; a few yellow leaves drop from the creeper round the window; the water flows cool and dim; the far distant sound of the wheels drones on continually. Dolly looks at it all. It does not seem to concern her, as she sits there sadly and wearily. Who does not know these hours, tranquil but sad beyond words, when the pain not only of one's own grief, but of the sorrow of life itself, seems to enter into the soul. It was a pain new to Dolly, and it frightened her. Some one coming in saw Dolly's terrified look, and came and sat down beside her. It was Mrs. Fane, with her kind

face, who took her hand, and seemed to know it all as she talked to her of her own life, talked to her of those whom she had loved and who were gone. Each word she spoke had a meaning, for she had lived her words and wept them out one by one.

She had seen it all go by. Love and friendship had passed her along the way; some had hurried on before, some had lagged behind, or strayed away from her grasp, and then late in life had come happiness, and to her warm heart tenderest dreams of motherhood, and then the final cry of parting love and of utter anguish and desolation, and that too had passed away. "But the love is mine still," she said, "and love is life."

To each one of us comes the thought of those who live most again, when we hear of a generous deed, of a truthful word spoken; of those who hated evil and loved the truth, for the truth was in them and common to all; of those whose eyes were wise to see the angels in the field at work among the devils. . . . The blessing is ours of their love for great and noble things. We may not all be gifted with the divinest fires of their nobler insight and wider imagination, but we may learn to live as they did, and to seek a deeper grasp of life, a more generous sympathy. Overwhelmed we may be with self-tortures, and wants, and remorses, swayed by many winds, sometimes utterly indifferent from very weariness, but we may still return thanks for the steadfast power of the noble dead. It reigns unmoved through the raving of the storm; it speaks

of a bond beyond death and beyond life. Something of all this Mrs. Fane taught Dolly by words in this miserable hour of loneliness, but still more by her simple daily actions. . . . The girl, hearing her friend speak, seemed no longer alone. She took Mrs. Fane's hand and looked at her, and asked whether she might not come and live there some day, and try to help her with her sick people.

"Did I ever tell you that, long ago, Colonel Fane told me I was to come?" said Dolly, smiling.

"You shall come whenever you like," said Mrs. Fane, smiling, "but you will have other things to do, my dear, and you must ask your cousin's leave."

"Robert! I don't think he would approve," said Dolly, looking at a letter which had come from him only that morning. "There are many things, I fear. . ." She stopped short and blushed painfully as one of the nurses came to the door. Only that day Dolly had done something of which she feared he might disapprove. She had written to Mr. Tapeall, in reply to a letter from him, and asked him to lose no time in acting upon George's will. She had a feverish longing that what he had wished should be done without delay.

There is a big van at the door of the house in Old Street: great packing-cases have been hoisted in; a few disconsolate chairs and tables are standing on the pavement; the one looking-glass of the establishment comes out sideways, and stuffed with straw; the creepers hang for sole curtains to the windows; George's plants

are growing already into tangle in the garden; John's study is no longer crammed with reports,—the very flavour of his tobacco-smoke in it is gone, and the wind comes blowing freshly through the open window. Cassie and Zoe are away in the country on a visit; the boys are away; Rhoda and Mrs. Morgan are going back to join John in the City. The expense of the double household is more than the family purse can conveniently meet. The gifts the rector has to bestow are not those of gold or of silver.

They have been working hard all the morning, packing, directing: Rhoda showing great cleverness and aptitude, for she was always good at an emergency; and now, tired out, with dusty hands and soiled apron, she is resting on the one chair which remained in the drawing-room, while Mrs. Morgan, downstairs, is giving some last directions. Rhoda is glad to go; to leave the old tiresome house; and yet, as she told Dolly, it is but the old grind over again, which is to recommence, and she hates it more and more. Vague schemes cross her mind—vague and indirect regrets. Is she sorry for George? Yes, Rhoda is as sorry as it is in her nature to be. She put on a black dress when she heard he was dead; but again and again the thought came to her how different things might have been. If she had only known all, thought Rhoda, naïvely, how differently she would have acted. As they sat in the empty room, where they used to make music once, she thought it all over. How dull they had all been! She felt ill and aggrieved. There was Raban, who

never came near her now. It was all a mistake from the beginning. . . . Then she began to think about her future. She had heard of a situation in Yorkshire—Mrs. Boswarrick wanted a governess for her children. Should she offer herself? Was it near Ravensrick she wondered? This was not the moment for such reflections. One of the men came for the chair on which she was sitting. Rhoda then went into the garden, and looked about for the last time, walking once more round the old gravel-walk. George's strawberry-plants had spread all over the bed; the verbena was green and sprouting; the vine-wall was draped with falling sprays and tendrils. She pulled a great bunch down and came away, tearing the leaves one by one from the stem. Yes, she would write to Mrs. Boswarrick, she thought.

Old Betty was standing at the garden door. "T' missus was putten her bonnet an," she said; "t' cab was at door; and t' poastman wanted to knaw whar' to send t' letters: he had brought one,"—and Betty held out a thick envelope, addressed to Miss Parnell.

It was a long letter, and written in a stiff round hand, on very thick paper. Rhoda understood not one word of it at first; then she looked again more closely.

As she stood there reading it, absorbed, with flushed cheeks, with a beating heart, Mrs. Morgan called her hastily. "Come, child," she said, "we shall have to give the cabman another sixpence for waiting!"

but Rhoda read on, and Mrs. Morgan came up, vexed and impatient, and tapped her on the shoulder.

"Don't," said Rhoda, impatiently, reading still, and she moved away a step.

"Are you going to keep me all day, Rhoda?" said Mrs. Morgan, indignant and surprised.

"Aunt Morgan," said Rhoda, looking up at last, "something has happened." Her eyes were glittering, her lips were set tight, her cheeks were burning bright. "It is all mine, they say."

"What do you mean?" said the old lady. "Were the keys in the box, Betty?" Rhoda laid her hand upon her aunt's arm.

"George Vanborough has left me all his money!" she said in a low voice. For a moment her aunt looked at her in amazement.

"But you mustn't take it, my dear!" said Mrs. Morgan, quite breathless.

"Poor George! it was his last wish," said Rhoda, gazing fixedly before her.

Mr. Tapeall was a very stupid old man, weaving his red tape into ungracious loops and meshes, acting with due deliberation. If an address was to be found in the Red Book, he would send a clerk to certify it before despatching a letter by post. When Dolly some time before had sent him George's will, he put it carefully away in his strong box; now when she wrote him a note begging him to do at once what was necessary,

he deliberated greatly, and determined to write letters to the whole family on the subject.

Mrs. Palmer replied by return of post. She was not a little indignant when the old lawyer had announced to her that he could not answer for the turn which circumstances might take, nor for the result of an appeal to the law. He was bound to observe that George's will was perfectly valid. It consisted of a simple gift, in formal language, of all his property, real and personal, to Rhoda. By the late "Wills Act" of 1837, this gift would pass all the property as it stood at his death; or, as Mr. Tapeall clearly expressed it, "would speak as from his death as to the property comprised therein." Mr. Tapeall recommended that his clients should do nothing for the present. The onus of proof lay with the opposite side. Mr. Raban had promised to ascertain all particulars, as far as might be: on his return from the Crimea they would be in a better position to judge.

Mrs. Palmer wrote back furious. Mr. Tapeall had reasons of his own. He knew perfectly well that it was a robbery, that every one would agree in this. It was a plot, she would not say by whom concocted. She was so immoderate in her abuse that Mr. Tapeall was seriously offended. Mrs. Palmer must do him the justice to withdraw her most uncalled-for assertions. Miss Vanborough herself had requested him to prove her brother's will and carry out his intentions as trustee to her property. He considered it his duty to acquaint Miss Parnell with the present state of affairs.

Mr. Tapeall happened to catch cold and to be confined to his room for some days. He had a younger partner, Mr. Parch, a man of a more energetic and fiery temperament, and when, in Mr. Tapeall's absence, a letter arrived signed Philippa Palmer, presenting her compliments, desiring them *at once* to destroy that will of her son's, to which, for their own purposes, no doubt, they were pretending to attach importance, Mr. Parch, irritated and indignant, sat down then and there and wrote off to Mrs. Palmer and to Miss Rhoda Parnell by that same post.

The letter to Mrs. Palmer was short and to the purpose. She was at liberty to consult any other member of the profession in whom she placed more confidence. To Miss Parnell, Mr. Parch related the contents of his late client's will.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN EXPLANATION.

So innocent arch, so cunning simple.

TENNYSON.

LADY SARAH had left much more than anybody expected. She had invested her savings in houses. Some had sold lately at very high prices. A builder had offered a large sum for Church House itself and the garden. It was, as Mr. Tapeall said: the chief difficulty lay in the proof of George's death. Alas for human nature! after an enterprising visit from Rhoda to Gray's Inn (she had been there before with Mrs. Palmer), after a not very long interview, in which Rhoda opened her heart and her beautiful eyes, and in the usual formula expressed her helpless confidence in Mr. Tapeall's manly protection, the old lawyer was suddenly far more convinced than he had been before of the justice of Miss Parnell's claims. Her friend and benefactor had died on the 21st. He was Lady Sarah's heir, he had *wished* her to have this last token of his love, but she would give everything up, she said, rather than go to law with those whom she must ever revere, as belonging to him.

Mr. Tapeall was very much touched by her generosity.

"Really, you young ladies are outvieing each other," said he. "When you know a little more of the world and money's use——"

Rhoda started to go.

"I must not stay now; but then I shall trust to you *entirely*, Mr. Tapeall," she said. "You will always tell me what to do? Promise me that you will."

"Perhaps, under the circumstances," said Mr. Tapeall, hesitating, "it might be better if you were to take some other opinion."

"No, no," said the girl, "there is no division between us. All I wish is to do what is *right*, and to carry out dear George's wishes."

It is not the place here to enter into details which Mr. Tapeall alone could properly explain. It was after an interview with him that Dolly wrote to Rhoda:—"Mr. Tapeall tells me of your generous offer, dear Rhoda, and that you are ready to give everything up sooner than go to law. Do not think that I am not glad that you should have what would have been yours if you had married my brother. I must always wish what he wished, and I write this to tell you that you must not think of me: my best happiness now is doing what he would have liked."

To Dolly it seemed, in her present morbid and over-wrought state, as if this was a sort of expiation for her hardness to Rhoda, whom George had loved, and indeed money seemed to her at that time but a very small thing, and the thought of Church House so sad that she could never wish to go back to it.

And Robert's letters seemed to grow colder and colder, and everything was sad together.

Frank came to see her one day before she left London; he had been and come back, and was going again with fresh supplies to the East; he brought her a handful of dried grass from the slope where George had fallen. Corporal Smith had shown him the place where he had found the poor young fellow lying. Frank had also seen Colonel Fane, who had made all inquiries at the time. The date of the boy's death seemed established without doubt.

When Frank said something of business, and of disputing the will, Dolly said,—"Please, please let it be. There seems to be only one pain left for me now—that of not doing as he wished." People blamed Raban very much afterwards for having so easily agreed to give up Miss Vanborough's rights.

The storm of indignation, consternation, is over. The shower of lawyers' letters is dribbling and dropping more slowly. Mrs. Palmer had done all in her power, sat up all night, retired for several days to bed, risen by daybreak, gone on her knees to Sir Thomas, apostrophised Julie, written letter after letter, and finally come up to town, leaving Dolly at Henley Court. Dolly was in disgrace, direst disgrace. It was all her fault, her strange and perverted obstinacy, that led her to prefer others to her own mother. The Admiral, too, how glad he would have been of a home in London. How explain her own child's conduct? Dear George had never for one instant intended to

leave anything but his own fortune to Rhoda. How could Dolly deny this? How could she? Poor Dolly never attempted to deny it. Sir Thomas had tried in vain to explain to his sister that Dolly had nothing whatever to do with the present state of the law. It was true that she steadily refused to put the whole thing into Chancery, as many people suggested; but Rhoda, too, refused to plead, and steadily kept to her resolution of opposing everything first.

"Painful, indeed, very painful," said Mr. Stock, "but absolutely necessary under the circumstances; otherwise I should say" (with a glance at poor pale Dolly), "let it go, let it go, worm and moth, dross, dross, dross."

"Mr. Stock, you are talking nonsense," said Mrs. Palmer, quite testily.

Then Mrs. Palmer came to London with Sir Thomas, and all day long the faded fly —it has already appeared in these pages—travelled from Gray's Inn to Lincoln's Inn, to the Temple, and back to Mr. Tapeall's again. Mrs. Palmer left a card at the Lord Chancellor's private residence, then picked up her brother at his Club, went off to the City to meet Rhoda face to face, and to insist upon her giving up her ill-gotten wealth. She might have spared herself the journey. Rhoda had left the Rectory. John Morgan received Mrs. Palmer and her companion with a very grave face. Cassie and Zoe left the room. Mrs. Morgan came down in an old cap looking quite

crushed and subdued. The poor old lady began to cry.

John was greatly troubled: he said, "I don't know how to speak of this wretched business. What can you think of us, Mrs. Palmer?"

"You had better not ask me, Mr. Morgan," said Mrs. Palmer. "I have come to speak to your niece."

"I am sorry to say that Rhoda has left our house," John said; "she no longer cares for our opinion: she has sent for one of her own father's relations."

"Perhaps you can tell me where to find her?" said Mrs. Palmer, in her most sarcastic tone. She thought Rhoda was upstairs and ashamed to come down.

"Oh! Mrs. Palmer, she is at Church House," burst in Mrs. Morgan; "we entreated her not to go. John forbade her. Mr. Tapeall gave her leave. If only Frank Raban were back!"

Mrs. Palmer gave a little shriek. "At Church House already! It is disgraceful, utterly disgraceful, *that* is what I think. Dolly and all of you are behaving in the most scandalous——"

"Poor Dolly has done no harm," said Morgan, turning very red. "She has not unjustly and ungratefully grasped at a quibble, taken what does not belong to her, paid back all your kindness with ingratitude . . ."

Good-natured Sir Thomas was touched by the curate's earnestness. He held out his hand.

"You, of course, Morgan, have nothing to do with

the circumstances," said he. "Something must be done; some arrangement must be made. Anything is better than going to law."

"If Mrs. Palmer would only see her," said Mrs. Morgan, earnestly. "I know Rhoda would think it most kind."

"I refuse to see Miss Parnell," said Mrs. Palmer, with dignity. "As for Tapeall, Thomas, let us go to him."

"They certainly do not seem to have profited by Rhoda's increase of fortune, living on in that horrible dingy place," Sir Thomas said, as the fly rolled away towards Gray's Inn once more. On the road Mrs. Palmer suddenly changed her mind, and desired the coachman to drive to Kensington.

"Do you really propose to go there?" said Sir Thomas, rather doubtfully.

"You are like the Admiral, Thomas, for making difficulties," said Mrs. Palmer, excitedly, and calling to the coachman to go quicker.

It was late in the afternoon when they reached the door of Church House. A strange servant opens to them; a strange stream of light comes from the hall, where a bright chandelier had been suspended. The whole place seemed different already. A broad crimson carpet had been put down; some flowers had been brought in and set out on great china jars. Mrs. Palmer was rather taken aback as she asked, with her head far out of the carriage-window, whether Miss Parnell was at home.

The drawing-room door opens a little bit, Rhoda listens, hesitates whether or not to go out, but Mrs. Palmer is coming in, and Rhoda retreats, only to give herself room to advance once more as the two visitors are ushered in. The girl comes flying from the other end of the room, bursts out crying, and clings kneeling to Philippa's dress.

"At last," she says. "Oh, Mrs. Palmer, I did not dare to hope, but oh! how good of you to come!"

"Good, indeed! No, do not thank *me*," said Mrs. Palmer, drawing herself up. "Have you the face, Rhoda, to meet me—to wish to see me after all the harm you have done to me and to my poor child? I wonder you dare stay in the same room with me!"

Rhoda did not remark that it was Mrs. Palmer herself who had come to her. Her eyes filled with big tears.

"What have I done?" she said, appealing to Sir Thomas. "It is all theirs, and they know it. It will *always* be theirs. Oh, Mrs. Palmer, if you would only take it all, and let me be your—your little companion, as before!" cried the girl, with a sob, fixing those wonderful constraining eyes of hers upon Philippa. "Will you send me away—I, who owe everything to you?" she said. And she clasped her hands and almost knelt. The baronet instinctively stepped forward to raise her.

"Do not kneel, Rhoda. This is all pretence," cried Mrs. Palmer. "Sir Thomas is easily deceived. If the Admiral were here he would see through your

—your ungrateful duplicity." Rhoda only persisted. How her eyes spoke! how her hands and voice entreated!

"You would believe me," she said, "indeed, you would, if you could see my heart. My only thought is to do as you wish, and to show you that I am not ungrateful."

"Then you will give it all back," said Mrs. Palmer, coming to the point instantly, and seizing Rhoda's hand tight in hers.

"Of course I will," said Rhoda, still looking into Mrs. Palmer's eager face. "I have done so already. It is all yours; it always will be yours, as before. Dear Mrs. Palmer, this is your house; your room is ready: I have put some flowers there. It is, oh, so sad here all alone! the walls seem to call for you! If you send me away I don't know what will happen to me!" and she began to cry. "My own have sent me away; there is no one left but you, and the memory of his love for me."

I don't know how or where Rhoda had studied human nature, nor how she had learnt the art of suiting herself to others. Mrs. Palmer came in meaning to speak her mind plainly, to overwhelm the girl with reproach; before she had been in the room two minutes she had begun to soften. There was the entreating Rhoda: no longer shabby little Rhoda from the curate's house, but an elegant lady in a beautiful simple dress, falling in silken folds; her cloud of dark hair was fashionably frizzed; her manner had changed—it was

appealing and yet dignified, as befitted an heiress. All this was not without its effect upon Philippa's experienced eye.

Rhoda had determined from the first to win Mrs. Palmer over, to show the world that hers was no stolen wealth, no false position. She felt as if it would make everything comfortable both to her own conscience, which was not over easy, and to those from whom she was taking her wealth, if only a reconciliation could be brought about; what need was there for a quarrel —for going to law, if only all could be reconciled. She would do anything they wished—serve them in a hundred ways. Uncle John, who had spoken so unkindly, would see then who was right; Aunt Morgan, too, who had refused to come with her, would discover her mistake. There was a certain triumph in the thought of gaining over those who had most right to be estranged, so thought Rhoda, unconsciously speculating upon Dolly's generosity, upon Mrs. Palmer's suddenness of character.

"This is all *most* painful to me," Philippa cried, more and more flurried. "Rhoda, you cannot expect ——"

"I expect nothing—nothing, only I ask *everything*," said Rhoda, passionately, to Sir Thomas. "Oh, Mrs. Palmer, you can send me away from you, if you will; or you can let me be your daughter. I would give up everything; I would follow you anywhere—anywhere—everywhere!"

Mrs. Palmer sank, still agitated, into the nearest

armchair. It was a new one of Gillow's, with shining new cushions and castors. Rhoda came and knelt beside it, with her lustrous eyes still fixed upon Mrs. Palmer's face. Sir Thomas cleared his throat; he was quite affected by the little scene. Mrs. Palmer actually kissed Rhoda at parting.

CHAPTER XX.

SHEEP-SHEARING.

Ba, Ba, black sheep,
Have you any wool?
Yes, Master, that I have,—
Three bags full.

LADY HENLEY had always piqued herself upon a certain superiority to emotion of every kind,—youth, love, sorrow had seemed to her ridiculous things for many years. This winter, however, had changed the little wooden woman and brought her grief and anxiety, and revealed secrets to her that she had never guessed before. Often the very commonest facts of life are not facts, only sounds, until they have been lived. One can't listen to happiness, or love, or sorrow—one must have been some things in order to understand others. Lady Henley married somewhat late in life—soberly, without romance. Until then, her horse, her dog, her partner at the last ball, had been objects of about equal interest. She had always scouted all expressions of feeling. She had but little experience; and coldness of heart comes more often from ignorance than from want of kindness or will to sympathise.

Sometimes the fire of adversity warms a cold heart, and then the story is not all sorrowful. The saddest

story is that of some ice-bound souls, whom the very fires of adversity cannot reach. Poor Dolly sometimes felt the chill when Philippa, unconscious of the stab, would say something, do some little thing, that brought a flush of pain into her daughter's cheek.

The girl would not own it to herself, but there is a whole life reluctant as well as a life consenting. The involuntary words, the thoughts we would not think, the things we would not do, and those that we do not love, are among the strongest influences of our lives. Dolly at this time found herself thinking many things she would gladly have left unthought, hoping things sometimes that she hated herself for hoping, indifferent to others that all those round about her seemed to imagine of most consequence, and that she tried in vain to care for too. When Philippa began to recover from her first burst of hysteric grief, her spirits seemed to revive. They were enough to overwhelm Dolly at times, for she had inherited her mother's impressionability, and at the same time her father's somewhat morbid fidelity.

Lady Henley's dislike to her sister-in-law made her clear-sighted as to what was going on, and she tried in many ways to shield the girl from her mother's displeasure and incessant worry of recrimination. With a view to Jonah's possible interest, she had regretted Dolly's decision not to dispute the will as much as Mrs. Palmer herself, but she could not see her worried.

"Philippa is really too bad," she said one day.

"Thomas, can't you do something—send for some one—suggest something?"

Sir Thomas meekly suggested Robert Henley.

"The very last person I should wish to see," cried Lady Henley, sharply. "Bell, did you ever know your father understand anything one said to him?"

Lady Henley's concern was relieved without Sir Thomas's assistance. Before the end of the winter Mrs. Palmer had left Henley Court and firmly established herself at Paris. Dolly remained behind. It was Philippa's arrangement, and Dolly had been glad to agree to her cousins' eager proposal that she should stay on at Henley for a time. Nobody quite knew how it had happened, except, indeed, that Philippa had intended it all along; and she now wrote in raptures with the climate, so different from what they had been enduring in Yorkshire. But Joanna did not care for climate—her Palmer constitution was not susceptible to the influence of atmosphere.

All through that sad winter Dolly stayed on in Yorkshire. Their kindness was unwearied. Then, when the snow began to melt at last, the heavy clouds of winter to lighten, when the spring began to dawn, and the summer sun and the sweet tones of natural things to thrill and stir the world to life, Dolly, too, began to breathe again; she could not enjoy all this beauty, but it comforted her, nevertheless.

The silence of the country was very tranquillising and quieting. She had come like a tired child, sad and over-wearied. Mother Nature was hushing her

off to sleep at last. She spent long mornings in the meadows down by the river; sometimes her cousins took her for walks across the moors, but to Dolly they seemed more like birds than human beings, and she had not strength for their ten-mile flights.

"You know what our life is," she wrote to Robert, "and I need not describe it. I try to help my uncle a little of a morning. I go out driving with my aunt, or into the village of an afternoon with Norah; the wind comes cutting through the trees by the lodge-gate—all the roads are heavy with snow. Everything seems very cold and sad—everything except their kindness, which I shall never forget. Yesterday Aunt Joanna kissed me, and looked at me so kindly that I found myself crying suddenly. Dear Robert, she showed me the letter you wrote her. I cannot help saying one word about that one word in it in which you speak of your doubting that I wish for your return. Why do you say such things or think such unjust thoughts of me? Your return is the one bright spot in my life just now. Did I not tell you so when you went away? If I have ever failed, ever loved you less than you wished, scold me, dear Robert, as I am scolding you now, and I will love you the more for it. You and I can understand, but it is hard to explain, even to my aunt, how things stand between us. I trust you utterly, and I am quite content to leave my fate to you."

She sat writing by the fire on her knee as she warmed herself by the embers. She paused once or

twice and looked into the flame with her sweet dreamy eyes. Where do people travel to as they sit quietly dreaming and warming their feet at the fire? What long, aimless journeys into other countries, into other hearts! What strange starts and returns! Dolly finds herself by the little well in Kensington Gardens, and some one is there, who says things in a strange voice that thrills as Robert's never did. Does he call her his Rachel? Is love a chord? It had seemed to her one single note until Frank Raban had spoken. Is this Robert who is saying that she is the one only woman in all the world for him? Dolly blushes a burning blush of shame all alone as she sits in the twilight when she discovers of what she had been thinking.

"What are you burning, Dolly?" said her aunt, coming in.

It was her letter that Dolly had thrown into the fire. It had seemed to her false somehow, and yet she wrote another to the same effect next day.

Mr. Anley was going to Paris, and Dolly was to go with him. On the last day before she left her uncle took her for a drive. He had business beyond Pebblesthwaite, and while he went into a house Dolly wandered on through an open gate, and by a little path that led across a field to a stream and a great bleating and barking and rushing of waters. It was early spring. As she came round by the bridge she saw a penned crowd of sheep, a stout farmer in gaiters was flinging them one by one into the river,

they splashed and struggled in vain; a man stood up to his waist in the midst of the stream dowsing the poor gentle creatures one by one as they swam past. The stream dashed along the narrow gully. The dogs were barking in great excitement. The sheep went in black and came out white and fleecy and flurried, scrambling to land. Young Farmer Rhodes stood watching the process mounted on his beautiful mare; James Brand, with the lurcher in a leash, had also stopped for a moment. He looked up with his kind blue eyes at Dolly as she crossed the bridge, and stood watching the rural scene. The hedges and the river banks were quivering with coming spring, purple buds and green leaves, and life suddenly rising out of silent moors. James Brand came up to where Dolly was standing. He stood silent for an instant, then he spoke in his soft Yorkshire tones:

"T' ship doan't like it," he said. "T' water's cold and deep, poor things. 'Tis not t' ship aloan has to be dipped oft-times and washed in t' waters of affliction," moralised James, who attended at the chapel sometimes.

Just then Sir Thomas came up. He knew James Brand and Farmer Tanner too; he had come to buy some of these very sheep that were now struggling in the water; and he turned and walked on with Tanner towards the little farm. Dolly would not go in, she preferred waiting outside. All the flowers were bursting into blaze again in the pretty garden. Geraniums coming out in the window, ribës and lilies, dandies,

early pansies, forget-me-nots, bachelor's buttons, petunias, all the homely garland of cottage flowers was flung there. Beyond the walls were the chimneys of a house showing among the trees. Some men were working and chopping wood. The red leaves of last winter's frost still hung to the branches. Brand was coming and going with his dog at his heels, and he stopped again, seeing Dolly standing alone; she had some curious interest for him. She had rallied that day from a long season of silent depression. The spring birds seemed to be singing to her, the grass seemed to spread green and soft for her feet, the incense to be scenting the high air; it was a sweet and fresh and voiceful stillness coming after noise and sorrow and confusion of heart. The farmer's garden was half flower, half kitchen garden; against one wall, rainbowed with moss and weather stains, clustered the blossom of a great crop of future autumn fruits; the cabbages stood in rows marshalled and glistening too. The moors were also shining, and the birds whistling in the air.

"Dolly," said Sir Thomas, coming out fussily, "I find Raban is expected immediately. I will go up to the house and leave a note for him. I thought you had been here before," said Sir Thomas, as Dolly opened her eyes. This then was Ravensrick.

The worthy baronet was not above a condescending gossip with James Brand, and they walked up to the house. The number of men employed, the cottages, the schoolmaster's increase of salary. "Nice

old place," Sir Thomas said, looking round: then he went on—

"We must have a lady at Ravensrick some of these days."

"Wall," said old Brand, "he were caught in t' net once, Sir Thomas; 'tis well nigh eno' to make a young man wary. They laid their toils for others, as ye know, but others were sharper than he——"

"Yes, yes; what a very pretty view," said Sir Thomas, hastily pointing to a moor upon which a great boulder of rock was lying.

"That is t' crag," said Brand; "there's a watter-fo' beyond. I ca' that ro-mantic; Mr. Frank were nigh killed as a boy fallin' fra t' side. . . . . I have known him boy and man," the old fellow went on, with unusual expansion, striking his gun against a felled tree; "none could be more fair and honourable than my ma-aster; people slandered him and lied to t' Squire, but Mr. Fra-ank scorned to take mean adva-antage o' silly women, and they made prey of him. . . . ." They had reached the garden by this time, where old Mrs. Raban used to take her daily yards of walking exercise, and where the old Squire used to sun himself hour after hour.

The ragged green leaves of the young chestnuts were coming out, and the red blossoms of the sycamore, and the valley was full of light and blending green. But the house looked dark and closed, only one window was open. It was the library window, and Sir Thomas walked in to write his note. And

Dolly followed, looking round and about; she thought to herself that she was glad to have come—glad to have heard the old keeper's kindly praise of his young master. Frank must be her friend always, even though she never saw him again. The manner of his life and the place of it could never be indifferent to her. But she must never see him again, never think of him, if she could help it.

The door opened suddenly, and Dolly started from the place where she had been standing; it was only Becky of the beacon head, who had come in to ask if anything was wanted.

"We must be off," said Sir Thomas; "my compliments to Mr. Raban and this note. Tell him we hope to see him as soon as he can conveniently come over. Your poor Aunt is very anxious always," he said to Dolly in an explanatory voice, and then he stepped out through the window again, where Brand was still waiting.

Dolly looked back once as she left the room. "Good-by," she said in her most secret heart. "Good-by, forgive me if I have ever wronged you." As she went out, her dress caught in the window, and with an impatient, hurried movement she stooped and disentangled it.

As they were driving off again, Sir Thomas complacently announced that the works at Medemere were certainly a failure. "One would not think so from his manner; but Raban is a most incautious man," said he; "we must come again when you come

back to us, Dolly. Perhaps a certain traveller will be home by then," he added, good-naturedly.

"I shall be gone before Mr. Raban comes back," said Dolly.

"Robert—Robert. I was speaking of Robert, of course," said Sir Thomas, pulling at the reins.

Dolly blushed crimson as she stooped to look for a glove that she had dropped. That night again she awoke suddenly in a strange agony of shame for her involuntary slip. It seemed to reveal her own secret heart, from which she fain would fly; she had promised to be true, and she was not false, but was this being true?

What is it that belongs to a woman of a right, inalienably, as to a man probity, or a high-minded sense of honour—is it for women, womanliness and the secret rectitude of self-respect? My poor Dolly felt suddenly as if even this last anchor had failed, and for a cruel dark hour she lay sobbing on her pillow. Then in the dawn she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXI.

TEMPERED WINDS.

Oh, all comforters,
All soothing things that bring mild ecstasy,
Came with her coming.

G. ELIOT.

FRANK RABAN arrived that evening. The fires were burning a cheerful greeting; the table was laid in the library; his one plate, his one knife and fork, were ready. After all, it was home, though there was no one to greet him except the two grinning maidens. The dogs were both up at the lodge. As Frank was sitting down to dinner he saw something black lying in one of the windows. He picked it up. It was a glove. Becky roared with laughter when Frank asked her if it was hers; she was setting down a huge dish with her honest red hands. *Her* gloves! "They were made o' cotton," she said; "blue, wi' red stitchens'." She suggested that "this might be t' young lady's; t' gentleman and t' young lady had come and had walked about t' house wi' James Brand."

"What gentleman?—what young lady?" asked Raban.

"A pale-faced young lady in bla-ack cloathes," said Becky. "T' gentleman were called Sir Tummas. James Brand, he knawed."

"Sir Thomas! A pale young lady in black!"

Frank stuck the little glove up on the tall chimney. It seemed a welcoming hand put out to greet him on his return. He had guessed to whom the glove belonged even before he saw a little inky D marked in the wrist.

"So she had been there!" While he had been away life in its fiercest phases had met him, and at such times people's own feelings and histories seem to lose in meaning, in vividness, and importance. When whole nations are concerned, and the life of thousands is the stake by which the game is played; then each private story seems lost, for a time, in the great rush of fate. Frank had been twice to the East during that winter. He had seen Jonah, he had disposed of his stores. The little yacht had done her work bravely, and was now cruising in summer seas, and Raban had come home to his sheep and his furrows—to his old furrows of thought; how curiously the sight of that little glove brought it all back once more.

As Frank rode along the lanes, it was difficult to believe that all was tranquil as it seemed. That no ambush was lurking behind the hedges; that the rumble of carts travelling along with their load from the quarry was no echo of distant guns; that no secret danger was to be dreaded. This was the second morning after his arrival. The sunshine which Dolly had liked seemed to him also of good omen. The lilacs were coming into flower, the banks were sparkling with flowers: primroses and early hyacinths, summer green

and summer light were brightening along the road. Frank rode quietly along on his way to the Court, sure of a welcome from Lady Henley, for had he not seen Jonah? Bloom, little flowers, along the path; sing, little birds, from overarching boughs; beat, honest heart, along the road that leads to the goal of thy life's journey!

Lady Henley was the first person he saw when he rode into the park. Sunshiny though it was, she was tucked up in some warm furs and sitting on the lawn in front of the house.

"How do you do?" said Lady Henley. "My husband told me you were expected back. I hoped you might come. Well, have you brought me any news?"

When Lady Henley heard that Jonah was looking well, that Frank had seen him ten days before, had dined with him in his hut, she could not make enough of the messenger of good tidings. He must stay to luncheon; he must come to dinner: he must see the girls. The luncheon bell rang double-loud in Frank's honour, and Frank was ushered in; Norah and Bell bounced in almost immediately; an extra plate was set for Frank. The butler appeared and the page with some smoking dishes on a tray. That was all. Frank looked up in vain, hoping to see the door open once more.

"I am so sorry Sir Thomas is gone up to town with Mr. Anley," said Lady Henley. "It is some tiresome business of my sister-in-law's. My niece started with them this morning. We have had her all the

winter, poor thing. It is really most provoking about the property, and how Philippa can have made it up with that Parnell girl I cannot imagine. They are inseparable, I hear. Just like Philippa. Dolly is going on to Paris immediately with the Squire to join her mother—quite unnecessary. Have you heard that Robert Henley is expected back? It seems to me every one is gone mad," said Lady Henley. "He has only been out six months. . . ."

Frank asked how Miss Vanborough was looking.

Bell immediately volunteered a most dismal account.

"I am sure Dolly will go into a decline if some one does not cheer her up. Norah and I have done our best. We wanted to take her to the York ball, and we wanted to take her to Lynn Gill, and across the moor to Keithburn, and we tried to get her to come out huntin' one day. What she wants is stirring up, and so I told papa; and, for my part, I'm not at all sorry Robert is to come home," says Bell.

Mamma was evidently very much annoyed.

"What is the use talking nonsense, Bell? Robert would have done much better if he had stayed where he was, and Dolly too," said Lady Henley. "Everybody seems to have lost their head. Here is a letter from the Admiral. He is in town, on his way to America. He wants to meet Dolly: he will just miss her. As for Hawtry, I think he is possessed. Not that I am at all surprised, poor fellow," said Lady Henley, expressively. "We know what he finds at home . . ."

Frank went back very much dispirited after his

luncheon. It was later in the day, and the flowers and the sunshine seemed to have lost their brightness; but when he got home the little glove was still on the chimney-piece, with limp fingers extended.

The Hôtel Molleville stands in one of the back streets near the English Embassy at Paris. One or two silent streets run out of the Faubourg St. Honoré, and cross and recross each other in a sort of minuet, with a certain stately propriety that belongs to tall houses, to closed gates, enclosed courtyards, and high roofs. There is a certain false air of the Faubourg St. Germain about this special quarter. Some of the houses appear to have drifted over by mistake to the wrong side of the Seine. They have seen many a dynasty go by, heard many a shriek of liberty; they stand a little on one side of the march of events, that seem to prefer the main thoroughfares.

The Hôtel Molleville is somewhat less stately than its companions. The gates are not quite so lofty; the windows have seen less of life, and have not been so often broken by eager patriotism. It belongs to a noble family that is somewhat come down in the world. The present marquis, a stout, good-humoured man, had been in the navy in his youth, and there made friends with the excellent Admiral Pallmere, at whose suggestion he had consented to let a little apartment on the first floor to his lady, who had elected to reside in Paris during her husband's absence.

Paris comes with a cheerful flash of light, a sudden

multitudinous chorus. The paved streets rattle, the voices chatter, the note is not so deep as the hollow London echo that we all know, that slow chord of a great city.

Dolly and the Squire come driving along from the station with many jingles and jolts. Little carriages rattle past. It is evening playtime for those in the street. The shops are not yet closed; there is a lady sitting in every little brilliant shrine along the way. They drive on; they see long rivers of lamps twinkling into far vistas; they cross a great confluence of streams of light, of cries of people.

"Here we are at the Madeleine," says Mr. Anley, looking out.

In another ten minutes they have driven on and reached the English Embassy. Then, with a sudden turn that sends old Marker with her parcels tumbling into Dolly's lap, they drive up a side street and stop at the door of the house where Mrs. Palmer is living.

"I shall call and see how you are in the morning," says Mr. Anley, helping Dolly out. He would have accompanied her upstairs, but she begged him to go on.

The door of the house opens; Dolly and Marker come into a *porte-cochère* pervaded with a smell of dinner that issues from an open door that leads into a great lighted kitchen, where brazen covers and dials are shining upon the wall, where a dinner is being prepared, not without some excitement and clanking of saucepans. The cook comes to the door to see Dolly go by. A *concierge* comes forward, and Dolly

runs up the polished stairs. It all returns to her with strange vividness.

Dolly rang at the bell, and waited on the first landing, as she had been desired. A man in a striped waistcoat opened the door, and stared in some surprise at the young lady with her parcels and wraps, and at the worthy Marker, also laden with many bags, who stood behind her young mistress.

"Does Mrs. Palmer live here?" Dolly said, speaking English.

The man in stripes, for all answer, turned, drew a curtain that hid an inner hall, and stood back to let them pass. The hall was carpeted, curtained, lighted with hanging lamps. Dolly had not expected anything so luxurious. Her early recollections did not reach beyond the bare wooden floors and the china stoves in the old house in the Champs Elysées. She looked round wondering, and she was still more surprised when the servant flung open two folding-doors and signed to her to pass.

She entered, silently treading on the heavy carpet. The place was dim, warm with a fragrant perfume of flowers: a soft lamp-light was everywhere, a fragrant warmth. There was a sense of utter comfort and luxury: tall doors fast closed, draperies shining with dim gold gleams, pictures on the walls, couches, lace cushions; some tall glasses in beautiful old frames repeated it all—the dim light, the flowers' golden atmosphere. In the middle of the room a lamp hung over a flower-table, of which the tall pointed leaves

were crimsoning in the soft light, the ferns glittering; a white camelia head opening to this alabaster moon.

The practical Dolly stopped short. There must be some mistake she thought. A lady in a white dress was standing by the chimney, leaning against the heavy velvet top; a gentleman also standing there was listening with bent head to something she was saying. The two were absorbed. They did not notice her, they were so taken up with one another. Dolly had expected to find her mother and the Admiral. She had come to some wrong place. For an instant she vaguely thought of strangers. Then her heart gave a warning thump before she had put words to her thoughts. She was standing under the lamp by the great spiked leaves, and she suddenly caught hold of the marble table, for the room seemed to shake.

"Who is it, Casimir?" said the lady, impatiently, as the servant came up to her.

The tall gentleman also looked up.

Dolly's dazzled eyes were gazing at him in bewildered amazement. He had quickly stepped back when the man approached, and he now turned his full face and looked at Dolly, who could not speak. She could only stand silent, holding out her trembling hands, half happy, half incredulous. It was Robert—Robert, whom she had thought miles away—Robert, whose letter had come only the day before—Robert, who had been there with Rhoda, so absorbed that even now he scarcely seemed to recognise Dolly in

her travel-worn black clothes, looking like a blot upon all this splendour.

This, then, was the moment for which she had waited, and thought to wait so long. He had come back to her. "Robert!" she cried at last.

Perhaps if they had been alone, the course of their whole lives might have been changed; if their meeting had been unwitnessed, if Casimir had not been there, if Rhoda had not come up with many an exclamation of surprise, if all those looking-glasses and chairs and tables had not been in the way. . . . Robert stood looking down from the length of his six feet. He held a cold hand in his. He did not kiss Dolly, as he had done when he went away. He spoke to her, but with a slight constraint. He seemed to have lost his usual fluency and presence of mind. He was shocked at the change he saw. Those few months had worn her radiant beauty. She was tired by the journey, changed in manner. All her sweet faith and readiness to believe, and all her belief in Henley, had not made this meeting, to which she had looked forward as "her one bright spot," anything like that which she had expected. Something in Robert's voice, his slight embarrassment, something in the attitude of the two as she had seen them when she first came in and thought them strangers, something indefinite, but very present, made her shy and strange, and the hand that held her cold fingers let go as Rhoda flung her arms affectionately round her. Then with gentle

violence Dolly was led to the fire and pushed down into a satin chair.

"I only came last night," said Henley. "I was afraid of missing you, or I should have gone to meet you."

"We expected you to-morrow, Dolly," interrupted Rhoda, in her sweet voice; "we were so surprised to see *him* walk in;" and she quietly indicated Henley with a little motion of the head.

"Everybody seems to have been running after everybody else. I am ashamed of myself for startling you all," said Robert, jerking his watch-chain. "It is a whole series of changes. I will tell you all about it, Dolly, when you are rested. I found I could get leave at the very last instant, and I came off by the steamer. I wrote from Marseilles, but you must have missed my letter. This is altogether a most fortunate, unexpected meeting," he added, turning to Rhoda.

Henley's utter want of tact stood him in good service, and made it possible for him to go on talking. Dolly seemed frozen. Rhoda was very much agitated. There seemed to be a curious understanding and sympathy between Robert and Miss Parnell.

"Have you seen your mother?" said Rhoda, putting her white hand upon Dolly's shoulder. "How cold and tired you must be? Who did you come with, after all?"

"I came with—I forget," said Dolly. "Where is mamma?" and she started up, looking still bewildered.

"Your mother lives next door. I myself made the

same mistake last night," said Robert, and he picked up Dolly's bags and shawls from the floor, where she had dropped them. Rhoda started up to lead the way.

"You may as well come through my room," she said, opening a door into a great dim room scented with verbena, and all shining with lace frills and satin folds. A middle-aged lady in a very smart cap, who was reading the paper by the light of a small lamp, looked up as they passed. Rhoda carelessly introduced her as Miss Rougemont.

"My companion," she said, in a low voice, as she opened another door. "She is very good-natured and is never put out by anything."

Dolly followed straight on over the soft carpets, on through another dark room, and then another, to a door from whence came a gleam of light.

As Rhoda opened the door there came the sudden jingling of music and a sound of voices; a man met them, carrying a tray of refreshments; a distant voice was singing to the accompaniment of a piano. Julie stood at a table pouring out coffee; she put down the pot with an exclamation: "Good heavens, mademoiselle! Who ever would have thought——?" Some one came up to ask for coffee, and Julie took up her pot again.

"How stupid of me to forget!" said Rhoda. "It is your mother's day at home, Dolly. I will send her to you. Wait one minute."

Poor Dolly, it was a lesson to her not to come unexpectedly.

"Madame *will* be distressed," said Julie, coming forward, "to receive Mademoiselle in such a confusion! The gentlemen all came; they brought music; they want coffee at every instant, or *thé à l'Anglaise*."

As she spoke a little fat man came up to the table, and Julie darted back to her post.

Meanwhile the music went on.

"Petits, petits, petits oiseaux!"

sang a tenor voice—

"Jolis, jolis, jolis, petits!"

sang a bass—

"Jolis, petits, chéris!"

sang the two together.

But at that instant, with a rush, with a flutter, with her hair dressed in some strange new style, Mrs. Palmer at last appeared and clasped Dolly, with many reproaches.

"You naughty child, who *ever* expected you to-day! and the Admiral started off to meet you! How provoking. A wreck! utterly tired out! Come to your room directly, dearest. It is quite ready, only full of cloaks and hats. Here, Rhoda, cannot you take her in?"

"Never mind the cloaks and hats, mamma," said Dolly, with a smile. "I had rather stay here; and Julie will give me and Marker some coffee."

"Marker! Good gracious! I had forgotten all about Marker," exclaimed Mrs. Palmer.

CHAPTER XXII.

"SING HOARSE, WITH TEARS BETWEEN."

Sing sorrow, sing sorrow, triumph the good.

AGAMEMNON.

ROBERT had come back from India prepared to fight Dolly's battle. Although expressing much annoyance that this disagreeable task should have been left to him, he remembered Rhoda as an inoffensive little thing, and he had no doubt but that she would hear reason, if things were clearly put before her. She was too much in her right to be expected to give up everything, but Robert had but little doubt that he should be able to effect a compromise; he had lived long enough to realise how much weight one definite, clearly-expressed opinion may have in the balance. It was most fortunate that his official duties should have brought him home at this juncture. Dolly must consent to be guided by him. He was in some sense her natural protector still, although he felt at times that there was not that singleness of purpose about his cousin which he should have wished to find in the woman whom he looked upon as his future wife. At this time he had no intention of breaking with her. He wished to keep her in suspense. She deserved it: she had not once thought of him; she had behaved

most childishly—yielded where she should have been firm, sacrificed everything to a passing whim; she had been greatly tried, of course, but even all this might have been partly avoided if she had done as he recommended. So thought Robert as he was tying his white neckcloth in the glass at his hotel. The gilt frame reflected back a serious young man and a neatly-tied cravat, and he was satisfied with both. He came back to a late dinner with Rhoda after Mrs. Palmer's Thursday Afternoon had departed, taking away its cloaks and hats. Signor Pappaforte was the last to go. M. de Molleville took leave. Mrs. Palmer, needless to say, was charmed with the Molleville family—counts, marquises, dukes. They all lived in the house, overhead, underfoot. Mdme. la Comtesse was a most delightful person. M. le Comte was the only one of the family she did not take to, M. le Comte being a sensible man, and somewhat abruptly cutting short Mrs. Palmer's many questions and confidences.

The table was prettily laid in the big dining-room; the lamp-light twinkled upon the firmament of plates and silver spoons, and the flowers that Rhoda had herself arranged. She was waiting for her guests. Robert having, as in duty bound, first rung at his aunt's door, and learned from Julie that Mademoiselle was resting, and that Madame was dressing still, came across to the other apartment, where all was in order and ready to make him comfortable. Rhoda was sitting in her usual place on the little low chair by the fire. She had taken off her white dress—she had put

on a velvet gown; in her dark hair were two diamond stars: they shone in the fire-light as she sat thoughtfully watching the little flame. "Have you brought them?" she said, without looking round. "Are you alone? Come and sit down here and be warmed while you wait."

Rhoda's voice was like a bell, it rang so clear; when she was excited it seemed to rise and fall and vibrate. At other times she would sit silent; but though she sat silent, she held her own. Some people have this gift of voiceless emotion, of silent expression. Rhoda was never unnoticed: in her corner, crossing a street, or passing a stranger in a crowded room, she would mark her way as she passed along. It was this influence which had haunted poor George all his life, which made itself felt now as it had never done before. Rhoda now seemed suddenly to have bloomed into the sweetness and delicate brightness which belongs to some flowers, such as cyclamen and others I could name. She had been transplanted into clear air, into ease of mind and of body; she suddenly seemed to have expanded into her new life, and her nature had kindled to all sorts of new and wonderful things. Many of these were to be bought with silver and gold; it was not for affection, nor for the highest emotions, that little Rhoda had pined: hers was the enthusiasm of common-place: it was towards bright things of every kind that this little flame spirit turned so eagerly. Sometimes A gets credit for saying what B may have thought and felt, what C has lived for

years with courage and self-denial; then comes a Rhoda, who *looks* it all without an effort or a single word, and no wonder that Robert and many others were struck by her strange beauty and touched by her gentle magnetism of expression and of grace.

Henley came up, and without any hesitation established himself in the warm corner she indicated. The stiffness he had undoubtedly felt when they first met had worn off since that "business talk"—so Rhoda called it; and now he did not know whether it was business or pleasure as he listened to Rhoda's low song of explanation, and watched her white fingers opening to the fire. Signor Pappaforte's tenor was not to compare to Rhoda's soft performance. Perhaps I am wrong to use such a word; for, after all, she was as genuine as Dolly herself in her way—as Dolly who had fallen asleep, and was far away in spirit, dreaming a little dream of all that had happened that day.

Rhoda resumed their conversation quite naturally. "We may be interrupted," she said earnestly, "and there is one more thing I want to say to you. You know better than I do; you must judge for me. I always hoped that when you came, all would be arranged. I know nothing of business," she said, smiling. "I only know that I like my pretty things, and that it makes me happy to live here, and to have my flowers and my nice dresses and fresh air. Is it wrong? It seems a sort of new life to me;" and a wistful face was gently upraised. "If Dolly wishes it

I will give it all back—everything," said Rhoda, who knew that she was pretty safe in making this generous offer, and she smoothed the soft velvet fold wistfully with her fingers, as if she felt it was no longer her own. "Dolly refused, when I begged her to take it all long ago," she added. "Now I wish she had agreed before I became accustomed to this new life. I confess that I do not like to look back. Serge and smoke and omnibuses all seem more horrid than ever."

Robert scarcely knew how to answer the poor little thing. "Did you offer to give it all up?" he said, starting up, and walking up and down with long strides to hide his embarrassment. "I was never told of it, or I should certainly have ac—— Dolly should have told me," he said quickly—all his embarrassment turning into wrath against Dolly.

"Don't blame her," said Rhoda, in a low voice; "she is so generous, so noble. I can understand her refusing for herself; though I think if I had loved any one as—as Dolly must love—I should have thought of his interest first of all, and not of my own impulse. I know people might say it is very foolish of me and weak-minded," she said, faltering.

"They could only say that *you* were a true woman, and respect you for your generous devotion," said Robert, taking her hand. He dropped it rather awkwardly as Miss Rougemont came into the room, followed almost immediately by Mrs. Palmer.

"That tired child of mine is still asleep," said Mrs. Palmer. "Marker wouldn't let me awaken her."

"Then perhaps we had better not wait," said Rhoda, whose dark eyes were never more wakeful. "Ring the bell, Miss Rougemont."

So Rhoda and her guests sat down with a very good appetite to dinner; she charmed them all by her grace as a hostess. Miss Rougemont, who was not a guest, discreetly retired as soon as the meal was over.

Robert passed a very disturbed night. It was near twelve o'clock next morning when he rang at the door of his aunt's apartment. Dolly had been expecting him for a long time. The baker, the water-carrier with his clanking wooden pails, Mr. Anley's familiar tones, inquiring whether Miss Vanborough was "*engagée*"—every ring, every voice had made her heart beat. Robert found Mr. Anley still sitting with Dolly. They were by an open window full of spring flowers. The cheerful rattle of the street below, the cries of itinerant vendors, the noisy song of a bird in the sunshine, and the bright morning light itself poured into the room in a great stream of dazzling motes and gold, through which the girl came blushing to meet her kinsman.

"I am afraid your long sleep has not rested you," he said, looking at her hard, as she stood in the slanting stream, all illuminated for an instant—her rough hair radiant, her black gown changed to a purple primrose mist; then she came out of the light into

every day, and again he thought how changed she was.

"I have brought you some violets," and he gave her a bunch that he held in his hand. Robert thought Dolly changed. How shall I describe her at this time of her life? The dominant radiance of early youth was gone; a whole lifetime had come into the last few months. But if the brightest radiance was no longer there, a less self-absorbed person than Robert Henley might have been touched by the tender sweetness of that pale face. Its peaceful serenity did not affect him in the same way as Rhoda's appealing glances; it seemed to tell of a whole experience far away, in which he was not, and which, in his present frame of mind, only seemed to reproach him.

Dorothea had no thought of reproach. She was a generous girl, unselfish, able to forgive, as it is not given to many to forgive. She might remember, but malice was not in her. Malice and uncharitableness as often consist in the vivid remembrance of the pang inflicted, as in that of the blow which caused it. Dolly never dwelt long upon the pain she had suffered, and so, when the time came to forgive, she could forgive. She had all along been curiously blind to Robert's shortcomings; she had taken it for granted that she was in fault when he asserted the fact with quiet conviction; and now in the morning light she had been telling herself (all the time Squire Anley had been talking of his plans and benevolent schemes for a dinner at a café, presents for half the county, etc. etc.)

that perhaps she herself had been surprised and embarrassed the night before, that Rhoda was looking on, that Robert was never very expansive or quick to say all that he really felt, that this would be their real meeting.

The kind squire soon went off pleased at the idea of a happy lovers' meeting. He knew that there had been some misunderstanding. He looked back as he left the room, but the stream of light was dazzling between them, and he could not see their faces for it.

He might have stayed; his presence would have been a relief, so Dolly thought afterwards, to that sad sunshiny half-hour through which her heart ached so bitterly. She grasped the poor little bunch of violets tight in her fingers, clenching the bitter disappointment. It was nothing that she had to complain of, only everything. Had sorrow opened her eyes, had her own remorse opened her eyes?

"I did not think," Robert was saying, "I should see you so soon again, Dora. Poor Lady Sarah, of course, one could not expect. . . . I remember driving away," he added, hastily, as her eyes filled, "and wondering when I should get back; and then—yes, Marker called the cab back. I was glad of it afterwards. I had just time to come in and say good-by again. Do you remember?" And he tried to get up a little sentiment.

Dolly looked up suddenly. "Why did Marker call you back, Robert?" she asked, in a curious voice.

"I had forgotten my great-coat," said Robert. "One wants all one's wraps in the sunny Mediterranean. How pleasant this is! Is it possible I have ever been away?" And then he sat down in an affectionate attitude by Dolly on the green velvet sofa. He would not scold her yet; he would try kindness he thought. He asked her about herself, tried to reproach her playfully for her recklessness in money matters, spoke of his own prospects, and the scheme which had brought him home. Martindale had resumed his old post at the college for six months. It is not necessary here to enter into all Robert's details. He spoke of a growing spirit of disaffection in the East, and suddenly he discovered that Dolly was no longer listening.

"Why do you tell me all this, Robert?" she said, hoarsely, forgetting the rôle of passive acquiescence she had promised herself to play.

It hurt Dolly somehow, and wearied her to talk to Robert upon indifferent subjects. The hour had come —the great hour that she had dreaded and longed for —and was this all that it had brought? Sometimes in a tone of his voice, in a well-known look, it would seem to her that reconciliation was at hand; but a word more, but a look more, and all separation was over for ever—all reproach; but neither look nor word came. The key-note to all these variations of feeling never sounded. Poor Dolly hated and loved alternately during this cruel hour; loved the man she had loved so long, hated this strange perversion of her

heart's dream. We love and we hate—not the face, nor the voice, nor the actions of this one or that one, but an intangible essence of all. And there sat Henley, talking very pleasantly, and changed somehow. Was that Robert? Was this herself? Was Robert dead too, or was it her own heart that was so cold.

Rhoda met her leaving the room some few minutes after.

"I have come to fetch you to luncheon," said Miss Parnell. "Is Mr. Henley there? I see you have got your violets, Dolly. Miss Rougemont and I showed him the way to the flower-market. We met at the door. I am afraid she kept him too long. It was very wicked of her."

Mrs. Palmer joined them at luncheon. Miss Rougemont carved and attended to their wants. Dolly was grateful for a Benjamin-like portion that she found heaped upon her plate, but she could not eat it. Everything tasted bitter somehow. Miss Rougemont was an odd, battered woman, with an inexpressive face; but she was not so insensible as Rhoda imagined. More than once during luncheon Dolly found her black rolling eyes fixed upon her face. Once, watching her opportunity, the companion came close up to Dolly and said, in a low voice, "I wished to say to you that I hope you do not think that it was I who detained Mr. Henley this morning. Miss Parnell, who rarely considers other people's feelings, told me that she had told you that *I*——" Dolly blushed up.

"He came in very fair time," she said, gently. Miss Rougemont did not seem satisfied. "Forgive me," she said. "I am old and you are young. It is well to be upon one's guard. It was not I who detained Mr. Henley." She meant well, poor woman; but Dolly started away impatiently, blushing up with annoyance. How dare Miss Rougemont hint, and thrust her impertinent suspicions before her?

Squire Anley, with his loose clothes flying, with a parcel under each arm, with bonbons enough in his pockets for all the children in Pebblesthwaite, a list of names and addresses in his hand, was inquiring his way to a dressmaker, Mademoiselle Hays, whose bill he had promised Mrs. Boswarrick to pay. (Squire Anley often paid Mrs. Boswarrick's bills, and was repaid or not, as the case might be. At all events, he had the satisfaction of seeing the little lady in her pretty Paris dresses.) All day long the sunshine has been twinkling, carriages are rattling cheerfully over the stones, sightseers are sightseeing, the shops are full of pretty things.

Lord Cowley has just driven out of the great gates of the British Embassy, and the soldier has presented arms. Flash goes the bayonet in the sunshine. Squire Anley, looking about, suddenly sees Dorothea on the other side of the street, and crosses to meet her.

"Alone?" said he. "This is very wrong. What are you doing? Where is everybody?"

"I am not alone," said Dolly; "they are in that

shop. Rhoda went in to buy something, and she called Robert to give his advice."

The Squire opened his eyes.

"It was very exemplary of Robert Henley to go when he was called," he said, laughing. "And where are you all going to?"

"I have to take some money from Mrs. Fane to a sick man in the English Hospital," Dolly said. "It is a long way off, I'm afraid. Mamma thought it too far, but they are coming with me."

Here Robert came out of the shop to look for Dolly.

"I did not know you had stayed outside," he said in his old affectionately dictatorial way, drawing her hand through his arm. "I should have scolded you, but I see you have done us good service." And he shook hands with the Squire.

"I was on my way to try and find you," said the Squire. "I have ordered dinner at the 'Trois Frères' at six. Don't be late. I am the most punctual of men, as Miss Dolly knows by sad experience."

"Punctuality always seems to me a struggle between myself and all eternity," said Dolly, smiling.

Robert looked at his watch, and then back at the shop. "There is nothing more necessary," he said. "I promised Rhoda to come for her again in twenty minutes. She is divided between blue and sea-green. I am afraid we shall be almost too late for the hos-

pital to-day. Can't you come back, Dolly, and help her in her choice?"

Dolly's face fell.

"I can't wait; I *must* go," she said. "The man is expecting his money to get home, and Mrs. Fane is expecting him."

"To-morrow will do just as well, my dear Dolly. You are as impetuous as ever, I see," said Robert. "We can't leave Rhoda alone, now that we have brought her out."

"To-morrow *won't* do," cried Dolly, and she suddenly let go his arm. "*I* will go alone. I am used to it. I must go," she insisted, with a nervous vehemence which surprised Mr. Anley. It was very unlike Dolly to be vexed about small matters.

But here Rhoda, smiling, came in turn from the door of the shop. She was dressed in violet and lilac and bright spring colours; in her hand she held a little bunch of flowers, not unlike that one which Robert had given Dolly at her suggestion.

"What is all this? Now we are going to the hospital?" she said. "I should have had my pony-carriage to-morrow—that was my only reason for wishing to put off the expedition."

A large open carriage with four places was passing by; Robert stopped it, and they all three got in. Mr. Anley watched them as they drove away. He did not quite like the aspect of affairs. He had thought Dolly looking very sad when he met her standing at the

shop door. What was Rhoda being so amiable about? He saw the lilac bonnet bending forward, and Dolly's crape veil falling as the carriage drove round the corner.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN ANDANTE OF HAYDN'S.

On admire les fleurs de serre,
Qui, loin de leur soleil natal,
Comme des joyaux mis sous verre,
Brillent sous un ciel de crystal.

T. GAUTIER.

THE carriage drove through the Place de la Concorde. The fountains were tossing and splashing sunlight, the shadow of the Obelisk was travelling across the pavement. The old palace still stood in its place, with its high crowding roofs, and shadows, and twinkling vanes. The early green was in every tree, lying bright upon avenues and slopes. It was all familiar —every dazzle and echo brought back Dolly's youthful remembrance. The merry-go-rounds were whirling under the trees. "Tirez—tirez," cried the ladies of the rouge-et-noir tables. "For a penny the lemonade," sang an Assyrian-looking figure, with a very hoarse voice, and a great tin box on his back. Then came Guignol's distant shriek, the steady roll of the carriages, and a distant sound of music as a regiment came marching across the bridge. The tune that they were playing sounded like a dirge to poor Dolly's heart, and so she sank back silently and let down her crape veil.

Meanwhile Rhoda and Robert were talking very happily together. They did not see that Dolly was crying behind her veil.

The hospital is a tranquil little place at the end of long avenues of plane-trees that run their dreary lengths for miles out of the gates of Paris. A blouse, a heap of stones, a market cart—there is nothing else to break the dreary monotone of straight pavement and shivering plane-tree repeated many hundred times. Sometimes you reach a cross-road: it is the same thing again. They came to the iron gates of the hospital at last, and crossed the front garden, and looked up at the open windows while they waited for admission. A nurse let them in without difficulty, and opened the door of a great airy, tranquil ward, where three or four invalids in cotton nightcaps were resting. The windows opened each way into silent gardens. It was all still and hushed and fresh; it must have seemed a strange contrast to some of the inmates. A rough, battered-looking man was lying on his back on his bed, listlessly tracing the lines of the ceiling with his finger. It was to him that the nurse led Dolly. "This is Smith," she said; "he is very anxious to go home to England."

The man hearing his name, sat up and turned a thin and stubbly-bearded face towards Dolly, and as he looked at her he half rose to his feet and stared at her hard: while she spoke to him, he still stared with an odd frightened look that was not rude, but which Dolly found embarrassing.

She hastily gave him the money and the message from Mrs. Fane. He was to come back to the home in —— Street. The nurse who had nursed him in the Crimea had procured his admission. He had been badly wounded; he was better, and his one longing was to get to England again. He had a little money, he said. He wanted to see his boy and give him the money. It was prize-money—the nurse had it to take care of; and still he went on staring at Dolly.

Dolly could not shake off the impression of that curious, frightened look. She told the Squire about it when they met at the café that evening, as they sat after dinner in the starlight at little tables with coffee and ices before them, and cheerful crowds wandering round and round the arcades—some staring at the glittering shops, others, more sentimentally inclined, gazing at the stars overhead. Mrs. Palmer was absorbed in an ice.

Voices change in the twilight as colours do, and it seemed to Dolly that all their voices had the cadence of the night, as they sat there talking of one thing and another. Every now and then came little bursts of revelry, toned down and softened by the darkness. How clear the night was! What a great peaceful star was pausing over the gable of the old palace!

The Squire was giving extracts from his Yorkshire correspondence. "Miss Bell said nothing of a certain report which had got about, to the effect that she was going to be married to Mr. Stock." ("Pray, pray spare us," from Mrs. Palmer.) But Bell did say

something of expecting to have some news for the Squire on his return, if Norah did not forestall her with it. "Mr. Raban is always coming. He is out riding now with papa and Norah; and we all think it an awfully jolly arrangement, and everybody is making remarks already."

"One would really think Joanna had brought up her girls in the stables," said Mrs. Palmer. "I am sure I am very glad that Norah is likely to do so well. Though I *must* say I always thought Mr. Raban a poor creature, and so did you, Dolly."

"I think he is one of the best and kindest friends I ever had," said Dolly, abruptly.

"Nonsense, dearest," said her mother. "And so you really leave us," continued Mrs. Palmer, sipping the pink and green ice, with her head on one side, and addressing Mr. Anley.

"I promised Miss Bell that I would ride with her on Thursday," said the Squire; "and a promise, you know . . ."

"It is not every one who has your high sense of honour," said Mrs. Palmer, bitterly. "Some promises --those made before the altar, for instance—seem only made to be broken."

"Those I have never pledged myself to, Madam," said the Squire, rubbing his hands.

"If some people only had the frankness to promise to neglect, to rob and to ill-use their wives, one could better understand their present conduct," Mrs. Palmer continued, with a raised voice.

"A promise—what is a promise?" Rhoda asked in her clear soft flute; "surely people change their minds sometimes, and then no one would wish to keep another person bound."

"That is a very strange doctrine, my dear young lady," said Mr. Anley, abruptly. "Forgive me, if I say it is a ladies' doctrine. I hope I should not find any price too dear for my honour to pay. I am sure Henley agrees with me."

Robert felt the Squire's eyes upon him: he twirled his watch-chain. "I don't think it is a subject for discussion," he said, impatiently. "A gentleman keeps his word, of course, at a—every inconvenience."

"Surely a mosquito?" exclaimed Mrs. Palmer. As she spoke, a sudden flash of zigzag light from some passage overhead suddenly lighted up the table and the faces of the little party assembled round it; it lit up one face and another, and flickered for an instant upon Rhoda's dark head: it flashed into Robert's face, and vanished.

And in that instant Dolly, looking up, had seen Rhoda, as she had never seen her before, leaning forward breathless, with one hand out, with beautiful gloomy eyes dilating and fixed upon Robert; but the light disappeared, and all was dark again.

They were all silent. Robert was recovering his ruffled temper. Mr. Anley was calling for the bill. Dolly was still following that zigzag ray of light in the darkness. Had it flashed into her dreams? had it revealed their emptiness, and that of my poor Dolly's

shrine? Even Frank Raban was gone then. A painful incident came to disturb them all as they were still sitting there. The noise in the room overhead had been getting louder and louder. Mr. Anley suggested moving, and went to hurry the bill. Presently this noisy window was flung open wide, with a sudden loud burst of shrieks and laughter, and remonstrance, and streams of light—in the midst of which a pistol-shot went off, followed by a loud scream and a moment's silence. Mrs. Palmer shrieked. Robert started up exclaiming. Then came quick confusion, rising, as confusion rises, no one knows how nor from whence: people rushed struggling out of the café, hurrying up from the four sides of the quadrangle: a table was overturned. Rhoda flung herself upon Robert's arm, clinging to him for protection. Dolly caught hold of her mother's hand. "Hush, mamma, don't be frightened," she said, and she held her fingers tight. In all the noise and flurry and anxiety of that moment, she had again seen Robert turn to Rhoda with undisguised concern. He seemed to have forgotten that there was any one else in all that crowd to think of. The Squire, who had been but a few steps away, came hurrying back, and it was he who now drew Dolly and her mother safe into the shelter of an archway.

The silence of the summer night was broken, the placid beam of the stars overhead put out by flaring lights—and anxious, eager voices, that were rung on every side. "He has killed himself"—"He wounded her," said some. "Wounded three," said others. "She

shot the pistol," cried others. Then came a man pushing through the crowd—a doctor. "Let him pass, let him pass!" said the people, surging back to make way. Squire Anley looked very grave as he stood between the two ladies and the crowd: every minute it grew more dense and more confused. Robert and Rhoda had been swept off in a different direction.

Afterwards they learnt that some unhappy wretch, tired of life and ashamed of his miserable existence, had drawn out a pistol and attempted to shoot himself that night as they were sitting under the window. His companions had thought he was in fun, and only laughed until he had drawn the trigger. They were thankful to escape from the crowd, and to walk home through the cheerful streets, rattling and flaring among these unnumbered tragedies.

The pistol-shot was still in Dolly's ears, and the ray of light still dazzling in her eyes, as she walked home, following her mother and the Squire.

As she threaded her way step by step, she seemed to be in a sort of nightmare, struggling alone against the overwhelming rush of circumstances, the remorseless partings and histories of life—threading her way alone through the crowds. The people seemed to her absorbed and hurrying by. Were they too alone in the world? Had that woman passing by been deceived in her trust? Dolly was surprised at the throb in her heart, at the curious rush of emotions in her mind. They were unlike those to which she was used. "Your part is played," said some voice dinning

in her ears. "For him the brand of faithless coldness of heart; for him the discredit, for him the shame of owning to his desertion. You are not to blame. You have kept your word; you have been faithful. He has failed. Explanations cannot change the truth of facts. Even strangers see it all. Mr. Anley sees it. Now at last you are convinced."

Dolly followed her mother and Mr. Anley upstairs. Rhoda and Robert were not come in. Mr. Anley, looking very grave, said he would go and look for them. Philippa flung herself wearily upon the drawing-room sofa: the fire was burning, and the little log of wood crumbling in embers. Dolly raked the embers together, and then came and stood by her mother. "Good-night, mamma," she said. "I am tired; I am going to bed," she said, in a sort of fixed, heavy way.

"It is your own fault," answered her mother, bursting out in vague answer to her own thoughts. "Mr. Anley says that Robert is behaving very strangely. If you think he is too attentive to Rhoda, you should tell him so, instead of looking at me in that heavy, disagreeable way. You know as well as I do that he means nothing; and you are really so depressed, dearest, that it is no wonder a young man prefers joking and flirting with an agreeable girl," and Mrs. Palmer thumped the cushions. "Give me a kiss, Dolly," she said. To do her justice, she was only scolding her daughter out of sympathy, and because she did not know what other tone to take.

Dolly did not answer. She felt hard and fierce; a sort of scorn had come over her. There seemed no one to go to now—no, not one. If George had been there, all would have been so different, she thought; and then his warning words came back to her once more.

Dolly put her hand to her heart and stood silent until her mother had finished. There was pain and love and fire in a heart like poor Dolly's, humble and passionate, faithful and impressionable, and sadly tried just now by one of the bitter trials that come to young lives—blows that seem to jar away the music for ever. Later comes the peaceful possession of life, which is as a revelation when the first flare of youth has passed away; but for Dorothea that peaceful time was not yet. Everything was sad. She was not blind. She could understand what was passing before her eyes. She seemed to read Robert's secret set plainly before her. She had stopped Miss Rougemont more than once when she had begun some mysterious word of warning; but she knew well enough what she would have said.

"A man must keep his word, at every inconvenience," said Robert.

Perhaps if Frank had never spoken, never revealed his story, Dolly might still have been unconscious of the meaning of the signs and words and symbols that express the truth.

Marker asked no questions. She brushed Dolly's

long tawny mane, and left her at last in her white wrapper sitting by the bed.

"Are you well, my dearie?" said the old woman, coming back and stroking her hair with her hand.

Dolly smiled, and answered by holding up her face to be kissed, and Marker went away more happy.

Whatever she felt, whatever her secret determination may have been, Dolly said not one word neither to her mother nor to her friend the Squire. She avoided Miss Rougemont's advances with a sort of horror. To Robert and Rhoda she scarcely spoke, although she did not avoid them. Robert thought himself justified in remonstrating with her for her changed manner.

"I am waiting until I know what my manner should .be, Robert," said Dolly, bitterly.

Robert thought Dolly very much altered indeed. As Dolly shrank back more and more into herself, Rhoda seemed to bloom and brighten—she thought of everybody and everything, she tried in a hundred ways to please her friend. Dolly, coming home lonely and neglected, would find, perhaps, fresh roses on her toilet. "Miss Rhoda put them there," Marker would say, grimly, and Dolly would laugh a hard sort of laugh. But all this time she said no word, gave no sign. "For *them* should be the shame of confessing their treachery," said this angry sullen demon that seemed to have possessed the poor child. And all the while Robert, serene in his ultimate intentions and

honourable sentiments, came and went, and Rhoda put all disagreeable thoughts of the future away. She had never deliberately set herself to supplant her friend, but she had deliberately set herself to win over Henley, and, if possible, to gain his support to her claims. It had seemed an impossible task. Rhoda was surprised, flattered, and bewildered to find how easily she had gained her wish, how soon her dream had come true. There it stood solid and complacent before her, laughing at one of her sallies; Rhoda began to realise that this was, of all dreams, the one she believed in most. It was something for Rhoda to have found a faith of any sort. At all events, there was now one other person besides herself in Rhoda's world. If Dolly was cross, it was her own fault. Miss Rougemont, too, had been disagreeable and prying of late—she must go. And as for Uncle John, if he wrote any more letters like that last one which had come, she should burn them unread.

No one ever knew the struggle that went on in Dolly's mind all through these bright spring days, while Rhoda was dreaming her tranquil little visions, while Robert was agreeably occupied, flirting with Rhoda, while they were all coming and going from one pleasant scene to another, and the roses were blooming once more in the garden at All Saints', while Signor Pappaforte was warbling to Mrs. Palmer's accompaniment, and Frank Raban, riding across the moors, was hard at work upon one scheme and another. He did not know it, but the crisis had come.

It was a crowded hall, a thousand people sitting in silent and breathless circles. An andante of Haydn's was in the air. It was a sweet and delicate music, both merry and melancholy, tripping to a sunshiny measure that set everybody's heart beating in time. There was a childish grace about the strain that charmed all the listeners to a tender enthusiasm. It made them cry and laugh at once; and though many sat motionless and stolid, you might see eyes shining and dilating, as mothers' eyes dilate sometimes when they watch their children at play. The childless were no longer childless while that gentle, irresistible music shook from the delicate strings of the instruments; the lonely and silent had found a voice; the hard of heart and indifferent were moved and carried away; pent-up longings were set free. Other strings were sounding with the Haydn; and it was not music, though it was harmony, of some sort that struck and shook those mysterious fibres that bind men and women to life. The hopelessness of the lonely, the mad longings of the parted, the storm of life, all seemed appeased. To Dolly, it was George's voice that was speaking once again. "Peace, be still," said the music, and a divine serenity was in the great hall where the little tune was thrilling.

In former times men and women assembled in conclave to see wild beasts tearing their prey; to-day it was to listen to a song of Haydn's—a little song, that did not last five minutes.

It had not ended when Rhoda whispered something into Robert's ear.

While the music was lasting Dolly was transported; as it ended her mind seemed clear. She was at peace, she understood it all, all malice and uncharitableness seemed *dissolved*—I know no better word—pangs of wounded pride, bitterness of disappointed trust, shame of unfulfilled promise—such things were, but other things, such as truth, honest intention, were beyond them, and Dolly felt at that moment as if she could rise above her fate, above her own faults, beyond her own failures. She would confess the truth to Robert: she had meant to be faithful to him; she had failed; she would take what blame there was upon herself, and that should be her punishment. She was too keen-sighted not to understand all that had been passing before her eyes. At first wounded and offended, and not unjustly pained, she had determined to wait in silence, to let Henley explain his own intentions, acknowledge his own shortcomings.

But something more generous, more truthful, impelled her now to speak. Rhoda and Robert were whispering. "Hush," Dolly said, and she laid her hand upon Robert's arm. He started a little uncomfortably, and then began suddenly to nod his head and to twirl his umbrella in time. Rhoda buttoned her long gloves and leant back in a pensive attitude. Dolly sat staring at the violins, of which the bows were flowing like the waves of a spring-tide on either side of the circle: beyond the violins were the wind

instruments and the great violoncellos throbbing their full hearts. There was instant silence, then a clapping of hands and a sort of murmur and sigh coming from a hundred breasts. As it all died away, Dolly stood up and turned to Robert: an impulse came to her to do now what was in her heart, to wait no longer.

"Robert ——" her voice sounded so oddly that he started and half rose, looking down at her upturned face. "Robert, I want you to listen to me," said Dolly. "I must tell you now when I can speak. I see it all. You were right to doubt me. I know it now. I have not been true to you. You must marry Rhoda," she said; then, stopping short, "I'm not jealous, only I am bewildered. . . I am going home. . . Don't come with me; but you forgive me, don't you, Robert?"

There was a sudden burst from some overture—the music was beginning again. Before Robert could stop her, Dolly was gone; she had started up, she had left her seat, her gloves were lying on the ground, her veil was lying on the bench, but it was too late to follow or to call her back; the people, thinking she was ill, had made way for her, and closed in round the door.

"What has happened?" said Rhoda. "Is she ill or angry? is she gone? Oh, what has happened? Don't leave me here alone, let me come too. . ."

Robert flushed up. "The eyes of the whole place are upon us," he muttered: then came something like an oath.

"Hush, silence," said the people behind.

Robert bit his lip and sat staring at the conductor's rod; every now and then he gave a little impatient jerk of the head.

Rhoda waited her time; he had not followed Dolly. The music went on; not one note did she hear; the time seemed interminable. But Robert, hearing a low sigh, turned at last; he did not speak, but he looked at her.

"You are angry?" whispered Rhoda.

"Why should I be angry with you?" he answered, more gently.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THAT THOU ART BLAMED SHALL NOT BE THY DEFECT.

Yesterday *this* day's madness did prepare,
To-morrow's silence, triumph, or despair.
Drink! for you know not whence you came, nor why;
Drink! for you know not why you go, nor where.

OMAR KHAYYAM.

ONCE, as Dolly was hurrying away through the passages to the great front entrance, she looked back, for she thought she heard Robert's step coming after her. It was only Casimir, the servant, who had been loitering by a staircase, and had seen her pass. She came to the great wide doors of the music-hall, where the people were congregated, the servants carrying their mistresses' carriage cloaks over their arms, the touters and vendors of programmes. The music was still in her ears; she felt very calm, very strange. Casimir would have darted off for the carriage if she had not stopped him.

"Is Mademoiselle indisposed? Shall I accompany her?" he asked.

But although Dolly looked very pale, she said she was not ill; she would go home alone: and when she was safely seated in the little open carriage he called for her, the colour came back into her cheeks. She leant back, for she was very tired. As she drove along

she tried to remember what had happened, to think what more would happen, but she could not do so. It was a feeling, not an event, that had moved her so; and the outward events that relate these great unseen histories to others are to the actors themselves of little consequence. As for the future, Dolly could scarcely believe in a future. Was anything left to her now? Her life seemed over, and she was scarcely twenty; she was sorry for herself. She did not regret what she had done, for he did not love her. It was Rhoda whom he loved; Rhoda who seemed to have absorbed everything, little by little. There was nothing that she had spared. Dolly wondered what they would say at the Court. She thought of Frank Raban, too. If the Squire's news was true, Frank Raban would be thinking no more of her, but absorbed in other interests. Even Frank—was any one faithful in life? Then she thought of George: he had not failed: he had been true to the end, and this comforted her.

Everything seemed to have failed with her, and yet—how shall I explain it?—Dolly was at peace with herself. In her heart she knew that she had tried, almost tried to do her best. No pangs of conscience assailed her as she drove home through this strange chaos of regrets and forgetfulness. Her hands fell into her lap as she leant back in the little carriage: it was bringing her away through the dull rattle of the streets to a new home, a new life, swept and garnished, so it seemed to Dolly, where everything was strange and bare—one in which, perhaps, little honour was to be

found, little credit. What did she care! She was too true a lady to trouble herself about resentments and petty slights and difficulties. They had both meant to do right. As for Rhoda, Dolly would not think of Rhoda just then, it hurt her. For George's sake she must try to think kindly of her; was it for *her* to cast a stone? Dolly came upstairs slowly and steadily, opened the door, which was on the latch, and came in, looking for her mother. Miss Vanborough had never, not even in the days of her happy love, looked more beautiful than she did as she came into the little sitting-room at home. A light was in her face, it was the self-forgetful look of someone who has passed for a moment beyond the common state of life, escaping the assaults of selfish passion, into a state where feeling is not destroyed but multiplied beyond itself. In these moods sacrifice scarcely exists. The vanities of the world glitter in vain, discord cannot jar, and in the midst of tumult and sorrow souls are at peace.

Mrs. Palmer was not alone; the Squire was there. He had brought news. He had been detained by a peremptory telegram from Norah — "*Jonah arrives Paris to-morrow; mamma says, remain; bring Jonah home*"—and Jonah, who had come almost at the same time as the telegram, had accompanied the Squire, and was waiting impatiently enough hoping to see Dolly. He had been somewhat bored by the little elderly flirtation which had been going on for the last half-hour between his aunt and his godfather (which sort of *pot-pourri*, retaining a certain faint perfume of bygone

roses, is not uncommon); but he did not move, except to go and stand out upon the balcony and stare up and down the street; he was leaning over the slender railing when Dolly came in, and so it happened that at first she only saw the Squire sitting by her mother's easy-chair. She gave him her hand. He stood holding it in his, and looking at her, for he saw that something had happened.

"Alone!" said Mrs. Palmer. "Is Robert with you? I have some news for you; guess, Dolly;" and Philippa looked archly towards the window.

Dolly looked at her mother. "I left them at the concert," she said, not asking what the news was.

"What made you leave them? Why do you stare at me like that?" cried Mrs. Palmer, forgetting her news. "Have you had another quarrel? Dolly, I have only just been saying so to Mr. Anley; under the circumstances you really should *not*—you *really* should——"

"It has all been a mistake, mamma," said Dolly, looking up, though she did not see much before her. "Everything is over. Robert and I have parted, quite parted," she repeated sadly.

"Parted!" exclaimed the Squire; "has it come to this?"

"Parted!" cried poor exasperated Philippa. "I warned you. It is your own fault, Dolly; you have been possessed all along. Mr. Anley, what is to be done?" cried the poor lady, turning from one to the

other. "Is it your doing or Robert's? Dolly, what is it all about?"

Dolly did not answer for an instant, for she could not speak.

The Squire began muttering something between his teeth, as he strode up and down the room with his hands in his pockets.

"Take care, you will knock over the jardinière," cried Mrs. Palmer.

Dolly's eyes were all full of tears by this time. As he turned she laid her hand upon the old man's arm. "It is my doing, not his," she said. "You must not be hard upon him; indeed it is all my doing."

"It is your doing now, and most properly," said the Squire, very gravely, and not in the least in his usual half joking manner. "I can only congratulate you upon having got rid of that abominable prig; but you must not take it all upon yourself, my poor child."

Dolly blushed up. "You think it is not my fault," she said, and the glow spread and deepened; "he was not bound when he left me, only I had promised to wait"—then with sudden courage, "You will not blame him when I tell you this," she said: "I have not been true to him, not quite true—I told him so; it was a pity, all a pity," she said, with a sigh. She stood with hanging hands and a sweet, wistful, tender face; her voice was like a song in its unconscious rhythms, for deep feeling gives a note to people's voices that is very affecting sometimes.

"You told him so—what will people say?" shrieked poor Mrs. Palmer; "and here is Jonah, whom we have quite forgotten."

Jonah was standing listening with all his honest ears. It seemed to the young soldier that he also had been listening to music, to some sweet sobbing air played with tender touch. It seemed to fill the room even after Dolly had left it; for when she turned and suddenly saw her cousin it was the climax of that day's agitation. She came up and kissed him with a little sob of surprise and emotion, tried to speak in welcome, and then shook her head and quickly went away, shutting the door behind her. As Dolly left the room the two men looked at one another. They were almost too indignant with Henley to care to say what they thought of his conduct. "Had not we better go?" said Jonah, awkwardly, after a pause.

But Mrs. Palmer could not possibly dispense with an audience on such an occasion as this; she made Jonah promise to return to dinner, she detained the Squire altogether to detail to him the inmost feelings of a mother's heart; she sent for cups of tea. "Is Miss Dolly in her room, Julie?" she asked.

"Yes, Madame; she has locked the door," said Julie.

"Go and knock, then, immediately, Julie; and come and tell me what she says, poor dear."

Then Mrs. Palmer stirs her own tea, and describes all that she has felt ever since first convinced of Robert's change of feeling. Her experience had long

ago taught her to discover those signs of indifference which . . . . The poor Squire listens in some impatience.

Meanwhile Robert and Rhoda are driving home together from the concert, flattered, dazzled, each pursuing their own selfish schemes, each seeing the fulfilment of small ambitions at hand, and Dolly, sitting at the foot of her bed, is saying good-by again and again. The person she had loved, and longed to see, and thought of day after day and hour after hour, was not Henley, but some other quite different man, with his face, perhaps, but with another soul and nature. . . . . That Robert, who had been so dear to her at one time, so vivid, so close a friend, so wise, so sympathetic, so strong, and so tender, was nothing, no one—he had never existed. The death of this familiar friend, the dispersion of this familiar ghost seemed, for a few hours, as if it meant her own annihilation. All her future seemed to have ended here. It was true that she had accused herself openly of want of faithfulness; but the mere fact of having accused herself seemed to make that self-reproach lighter and more easy to bear. After some time she roused herself; Marker was at the door and saying that it was dinner-time, and Dolly let her in and dressed for dinner in a dreamy sort of way, taking the things, as Marker handed them to her, in silence, one by one. The Squire and Jonah were both in the sitting-room when Dolly came in in the white dress she usually

wore, with some black ribbons round her waist, and tied into her bronze hair. She did not want to look as if she was a victim, and she tried to smile as usual.

"You must not mind me," she said presently, in return for the Squire's look of sympathy. "It is not to-day that this has happened; it began so long ago that I am used to it now." Then she added, "Mamma, I should like to see Robert again this evening, for I left him very abruptly, and I am afraid he may be unhappy about me."

"Oh, as to that, Dolly, from what the Squire tells me, I don't think you need be at all alarmed," cried Dolly's mamma: "Jonah met him on the stairs with Rhoda, and really, from what I hear, I think he must have already proposed. I wonder if he will have the face to come in himself to announce it."

Both Jonah and the Squire began to talk together, hoping to stop Mrs. Palmer's abrupt disclosures; but who was there who could silence Mrs. Palmer? She alluded a great deal to a certain little bird, and repeatedly asked Dolly during dinner whether she thought this dreadful news could be true, and Robert really engaged to Rhoda?

"I think it is likely to be true before long, mamma," said Dolly, patiently: "I hope so."

She seemed to droop and turn paler and paler in the twilight. She was not able to pretend to good spirits that she did not feel; but her sweetness and simplicity went straight to the heart of her two

champions, who would have gladly thrown Robert out of the first-floor window if Dolly had shown the slightest wish for it.

After dinner, as they all sat in the front room, with wide-evening windows, Julie brought in the lamp. She would have shut out the evening and drawn down the blinds if they had not prevented her. The little party sat silently watching the light dancing and thrilling behind the house-tops; nobody spoke. Dolly leant back wearily. From time to time Mrs. Palmer whispered any fresh surmise into the Squire's ear: "Why did not Robert come? Was *she* keeping him back?"

Presently Mrs. Palmer started up: a new idea had occurred to her. She would go in herself, unannounced: she would learn the truth: the Squire, he too, must come. The Squire did as he was bid: as they left the room Jonah got up shyly from his seat, and went and stood out on the balcony. Dolly asked him whether there was a moon.

"There is a moon rising," said the Captain, "but you can't see it from where you sit; there from the sofa you can see it." And then he came back, and wheeled the sofa round, and began turning down the wheel of the lamp, saying it put the moonlight out.

As the lamp went out suddenly with a splutter, all the dim radiance of the silver evening came in a soft vibration to light the darkened room. One stream of moonlight trickled along the balcony, another came

lapping the stone coping of the window: the moon was rising in state and in silence, and Dolly leant back among her cushions, watching it all with wide open eyes. Jonah's dark cropped head rose dark against the Milky Way. As the moon rose above the gable of the opposite roof a burst of chill light flooded the balcony, and overflowed, and presently reached the foot of the couch where Dolly was lying, worn out by her long day.

Robert, who had been taking a rapid walk on the pavement outside, had not noticed the moon; he was preoccupied by more important matters. Rhoda's speeches were ringing in his ears. Yet it was Dolly's fault all along; he was ready to justify himself; to meet complaint with complaint; she might have been a happy woman. He had behaved honourably and forbearingly; and now it was really unfair that she should expect anything more from him, or complain because he had found his ideal in another and more feminine character.

Dolly had heard the roll of the wheels of the carriage that brought Robert and Rhoda home, but she had not heard the short little dialogue which was being spoken as the wheels rolled under the gateway. The two had not said much on the way. Rhoda waited for Robert to speak. Robert sat gazing at his boots.

"One knows what everybody will say," he said at last very crossly.

"The people who know you as I do will say that Dolly might have been a happy woman," Rhoda answered; "that she has wrecked her own happiness;" and then they were both again silent.

Rhoda was frightened, and trembled as she looked into Robert's offended face. She thought that the end of it all might be that he would go—leave her and all other complications, and Rhoda had not a few of her own. If he were to break free? Rhoda's heart beat with apprehension; her feeling for Robert was more genuine than most of her feelings, and this was her one excuse for the part she had played. Her nature was so narrow, her life had been so stinted, that the first touch of sentiment overbalanced and carried her away. Dolly possessed the genius of living and loving and being to a degree that Rhoda could not even conceive; with all her tact and quickness she could not reach beyond herself. For some days past she had secretly hoped for some such catastrophe as that which had just occurred. She had taken the situation for granted.

"One sometimes knows by instinct what people feel," she said at last. "I have long felt that Dolly did not understand you; but then, indeed, you are not easy to understand." And Robert, raising his eyes from his boots, met the beautiful gloom of her speaking eyes.

One has sometimes watched a cat winding its way between little perils of every sort. Rhoda softly and instinctively avoided the vanities of Robert's

mind; she was presently telling him of her troubles, money troubles among the rest. She had spent more than her income; she did not dare confess to Mr. Tapeall; she felt utterly incapable of managing that fortune which ought never to have been hers—which she was ready to give up at any hour.

"Cleverer people than I am might do something with all this money," said Rhoda. "Something worth doing: but I seem only to get into trouble. You say you will help me, but you will soon be gone."

"I shall be always ready to advise you," said Robert. "If there is anything at any time——"

"But when you are gone?" said Rhoda, with great emotion.

There was a pause; the horses clattered in under the gateway.

"You must tell me to stay," said Robert in a low voice, as he helped Rhoda out of the carriage.

As the two slowly mounted the staircase which Dolly had climbed, Jonah, coming away from his aunt's apartment, almost ran up against them. Robert exclaimed, but Jonah passed on. What did Rhoda care that he brushed past as if he had not seen them? She was sure he had seen them, and Rhoda had her own reasons for wishing no time to be lost before her news was made public. She had won her great stake, secured her prize: her triumph was not complete until others were made aware of all that had happened. She urged Robert to tell his aunt at once.

"It is only fair to yourself. Dolly will be telling

her story—dear Dolly, she is always so kind; but still, as you have often said, there are two sides to a question. I am afraid your cousin passed us intentionally," said Rhoda. "Not that I care for anything now."

"Let us have our dinner in peace," said Robert; "and then I will tell them anything you like," and he sank down comfortably into one of the big arm-chairs, not sorry to put after dinner out of her mind. While he was with Rhoda he was at ease with himself, and thought of nothing else; but he had vague feelings of a conscience standing outside on the landing and ready to clutch him as he passed out of the charm of her presence.

He did not go straight off to his aunt when he left Rhoda, and so it happened that he missed Mrs. Palmer when she burst in upon Rhoda and Miss Rougemont. The resolute Robert was pacing the pavement outside and trying to make up his mind to face those who seemed to him now more like life-long enemies than friends. He took courage at last and determined to get it over, and he turned up the street again and climbed the staircase once more. Philippa had left the hall-door open, and Robert walked in as he had been used to do; he opened the drawing-room door. He was angry with Dolly still, angry with her mother, and ready to resent their reproaches. Robert opened the drawing-room door and stopped short at the threshold. . . .

The room was not dark, for the bright moon-

light was pouring in. Dolly was still lying asleep. A log burnt low in the fire-place, crimsoning the silver light. Robert was startled. He came forward a few steps and stood in the darkened room looking at the sleeping girl: something in her unconsciousness, in the utter silence, in the absence of reproach, smote him as no words of blame or appeal could have done. His excuses, his self-assertions, of what good were they here — who cared for them here? She scarcely moved, she scarcely seemed to breathe; her face looked calm, it was almost like the face of a dead person; and so she was—dead to him.

For an instant he was touched; taken by surprise; he longed to awaken her, to ask her to forgive him for leaving her; but as he stood there a dark figure appeared in the open window; it was Jonah, who did not speak, but who pointed to the door.

At any other time Robert might have resented this, but to-night something had moved his cold and selfish heart, some ray from Dolly's generous spirit had unconsciously reached him at last. He turned away and went quietly out of the room, leaving her sleeping still.

He did not see her again; two days later she left for England.

CHAPTER XXV.

HOLY ST. FRANCIS, WHAT A CHANGE IS HERE!

If when in cheerless wanderings dull and cold,
A sense of human kindliness hath found us,
We seem to have around us
An atmosphere all gold.

A. CLOUGH.

TWELVE o'clock is striking in a bare room full of sunshine. A woman, who is spending her twelfth year in bed, is eating tripe out of a basin; another sitting by the fire is dining off gruel; beds and women alternate all down the ward; two nurses are coming and going, one of them with a black eye. Little garlands of paper, cleverly cut out, decorate the place in honour of some Royal birthday. Two little flags are stuck up against the wall and flying triumphantly from the farther end of the room. A print of the Royal Family, brilliantly coloured, is also pinned up. Mrs. Fane is walking down the middle of the workhouse infirmary with a basket on her arm, when one of the old women puts out a wrinkled hand to call her back.

"Ain't we grand, mum?" says the old woman, looking up. "It does us all good;" and she nods and goes on with her gruel again.

"How is Betty Hodge to-day?" says Mrs. Fane. The old woman points significantly.

All this time some one has been lying quite still at the further end of the room, covered by a sheet.

"At eight o'clock this morning she went off werry comfortable," says the old woman. "Mrs. Baker she is to scrub the steps now; the matron sent word this morning."

That is all. In this infirmary of the workhouse it is a matter of course that people should die. It does not mean a black carriage, nodding feathers, nor blinds drawn, and tombstones with inscriptions. It means, ease at last, release from the poor old body that used to scrub the steps so wearily day after day. There it was, quite still in the sunshine, with the garlands on the wall.

"*I* shan't be long," said the old tripe-woman, sententiously. "She has been expecting to go for months. A friend has sent her a shroud and some silver paper ready cut; she says it is all ready, and she has seen the priest."

"Ah! Mrs. Blaney, you are a sufferer," says the nurse with the black eye. "She can't eat, mum, but she likes her cup of tea;" and the nurse, who also likes her cup of tea, eyes the little packet which she sees coming out of Mrs. Fane's basket, and fetches a canister, into which she elaborately shakes the refreshing shower.

Mrs. Fane hurries on, for she has a guest at home expecting her, and a tea-party organising for that afternoon, and she has still a visit to pay in the men's

ward. Some one brought her a message—a man called Smith wanted to speak to her; and she walked along the whitewashed walls and past check blue counterpanes, looking for her petitioner. By one of the high windows of the ward lay a brown haggard face, with a rough chin, and the little old slip-shod messenger pointed to attract Mrs. Fane's attention. She remembered the man at once. He had come to see her not long before. She had sent him some money to Paris—his own money, that he had given to a nurse to keep. Mrs. Fane looked with her kind round eyes into the worn face that tried to upraise itself to greet her.

"I am sorry to see you here," she said. "Did you not find your friends?"

"Gone to America," gasped the man.

"You know I have still got some of your money," said Mrs. Fane, sitting down by the bedside.

"It were about that I made so bold as to hask for to see you, mum," said the man. "I have a boy at Dartford," he went on, breathing painfully. "He ain't a good boy, but I've wrote to him to go to you, and if you would please keep the money for him, mum—three pound sixteen the Reverend calc'lated it—with what you sent for my journey here. I had better have stopped where I was and where the young lady found me. Lord! what a turn she giv' me. I know'd it was all up when I seed her come in."

He was muttering on vacantly, as people do who

are very weak. Mrs. Fane's kind heart ached for his lonely woe-begone state. She took his hand in hers —how many sick hands had she clasped in her healing palm—but poor Smith was beyond her help.

"I see a young fellow that died beside me at the battle of the Alma," said Smith, "and when that young lady came up, as you might be, it brought it all back as it might be now. He was a gentleman, they said; he weren't half a bad chap."

"Who are you speaking of?" said Mrs. Fane, not quite following.

"They called him George—George Vance," said the man; "but that were not his name no more than Smith is mine."

"I have heard of a man of that name who was wounded at the Alma; I did not know that he had died there," said Mrs. Fane. Her hand began to tremble a little, but she spoke very quietly.

Smith hesitated for a minute, then he looked up into the clear constraining eyes that seemed to him to be expecting his answer. "It ain't no odds to me now," he said, hoarsely, whether I speak the tru—uth or not; you're a lady, and will keep the money safe for my poor lad. Captain Henley he offered a matter o' twenty pound if we found poor Vance alive. He were a free-handed chap were poor Vance. We know'd he would not grudge the money. . . . . And when the Roosians shot him, poor fellow, it wasn't no odds to him."

Mrs. Fane looking round saw the chaplain passing,

and she whispered to the old attendant to bring him to her.

"And so you said that you had found him alive, I suppose?" said Mrs. Fane, quickly guessing at the truth.

"Well, mum, you ain't far wrong," said Smith, looking at his thin brown fingers. "There was another chap of our corps died on the way to the ships. It were a long way to carry them down to the shore: we changed their names. We didn't think we had done no great harm; for twenty pound is twenty pound; but I have heard as how a fortune was lost thro' it all—a poor chap like me has no fortune to lose."

"It was the young lady you saw who lost her fortune," said Mrs. Fane, controlling herself, and trying to hide her agitation. "You did her great injury, you see, though you did not mean it. But you can repair this wrong. I think you will like to do so," she said, "and—and—we shall all be very much obliged to you." "Mr. Morgan," Mrs. Fane continued, turning to the chaplain, who had come up to the bedside, "here is a poor fellow who wishes to do us a service, and to make a statement, and I want you to take it down." She had writing materials in her basket. She often wrote the sick people's letters for them.

"What is it, my man," said the chaplain; but as he listened his face changed. He gave one amazed and significant glance at Mrs. Fane, then biting his lips

and trying to seem unmoved, he wrote and signed the paper; Mrs. Fane signed it; and then, at her request, poor bewildered Smith feebly scrawled his name. He did it because he was told: he did not seem to care much one way or another for anything more.

"Joe can tell you all about it," he said. "Joe Carter—he has took his discharge. I don't know where he is—Liverpool may be."

John Morgan could hardly contain his excitement, and his umbrella whirled like a mill, as he left the workhouse. "You *are* a good woman; you *have* done a good morning's work," said the chaplain, as he came away with Mrs. Fane; "say nothing more at present. We must find out this Joe who was with him. Whatever we do let us be silent and keep this from that wretched, scheming girl."

Afterwards, it turned out, that it would have been better far if John Morgan had spoken openly at the time; but his terror of Rhoda's schemes was so great that he felt that if she only knew all, she would lay hands on Joe, carry off Smith himself, make him unsay all he had said. "There is no knowing what that woman may not do," said Morgan. "She wrote to me; I have not answered the letter. Do you know that the marriage is actually fixed? I am very glad that you have got Dolly away from that adder's nest."

"So am I," said Mrs. Fane, beaming for an instant; she had long ago taken Dolly to her heart with a confused feeling of some maternal fibre strung, of

something more tender and more enduring than the mere friendship between a girl and an older woman.

I cannot help it if most of those who knew my Dolly persisted in spoiling her. She wanted every bit of kindness and sunshine that came in her way. And yet she was free from the strain that had wrenched her poor little life, she need no longer doubt her own feelings, nor blind herself to that which she would so gladly escape.

The morbid fight was over, and the world was at peace. It was at peace, but unutterably sad, empty, meaningless. When people complain that their lives are dull and have no meaning, it is that they themselves have no meaning. Dolly felt as if she had been in the thick of the fight, and come away wounded. "I may as well be here as anywhere else," she had said that moonlight evening when poor Jonah had entreated her in vain to come away with him.

Dolly would not go back to Henley; she had her own reasons for keeping away. But next morning, when an opportune letter came from Mrs. Fane, Dolly, who had lain awake all night, went to her mother, who had slept very comfortably, and said, "Mamma, if you can spare me, I think I will go over to England with the Squire and Jonah for a little time, until the marriage is over." Mrs. Palmer was delighted. "To Yorkshire? Yes, dearest, the very best thing you can do."

"Not to Henley, mamma," Dolly said; "I should

like, please, to go to Mrs. Fane's, if you do not object."

"What a child you are," cried Mrs. Palmer; "you prefer poking yourself away in that horrid, dismal hospital, when poor Jonah is on his knees to you to go back to Henley with him."

"Perhaps that is the reason why I must not go, mamma," said Dolly, smiling. "I must not have any explanations with Jonah." Mrs. Palmer was seriously angry, and settled herself down for another nap.

So Dolly came to England one summer's afternoon, escorted by her faithful knights. All the streets were warm and welcoming; the windows were open, and the shadows were painting the pretty old towers and steeples of the city; some glint of an Italian sky had come to visit our northern world.

John Morgan met her at the train, Mrs. Fane stood on the door-step to welcome her, the roar of the streets sounded homelike and hopeful once more.

As for Lady Henley she was furiously jealous when she heard of Dolly in London, and with Mrs. Fane. She abused her to everybody for a fortnight. Jonah had come home for two days and then returned to town again. "That is all we get of him after all we have gone through," cried poor Lady Henley; "however, perhaps there is a good reason for it; all one wants is to see one's children happy," said the little lady to Mr. Redmayne, who was dining at the Court.

John Morgan lost no time in writing to his con-

fessor, Frank Raban, to tell him of the strange turn that events had taken. "I entreat you to say no word of this to any one," said Morgan. "I am afraid of other influence being brought to bear upon this man that we are in search of, and it is most necessary that we should neglect no precautions. Dolly's interests have been too carelessly served by us all." Raban was rather annoyed by this sentence in Morgan's letter. What good would it have done to raise an opposition that would have only pained a person who was already sorely tried in other ways? Frank somewhat shared Dolly's carelessness about money, as we know. Perhaps in his secret heart it had seemed to him that it was not for him to be striving to gain a fortune for Dolly—a fortune that she did not want. Now he suddenly began to blame himself and determined to leave no stone unturned to find the evidence that was wanted. And yet he was more estranged from Dolly at this moment than he had ever been in his life before. He had purposely abstained from any communication with her. He knew she was in London and he kept away.

Frank Raban was a man of a curious doggedness and tenderness of nature. When he had once set his mind to a thing he went through with his mind. He could not help himself any more than some people can help being easily moved and dissuaded from their own inclinations; only he could not help listening to the accounts that now reached him of the catastrophe at Paris, and feeling that any faint persistent hope was now crushed for ever.

Lady Henley's wishes were apt to colour her impression of events as they happened. According to her version, it was for Jonah's sake that Dolly had broken with Robert. It was to Jonah that Dolly had confided her real reason for parting from her cousin. "You know it yourself, Squire. It was painful, but far better than the alternative."—"Miss Vanborough's confidences did not extend so far as you imagine, my dear lady," said Mr. Anley: "I must honestly confess that I heard nothing of the sort."

Lady Henley was peremptory. She was not at liberty to show her son's last letter, but she had *full* authority for her information. She was not in the habit of speaking at random. Time would show. Lady Henley looked obstinate. The Squire seemed annoyed. Frank Raban said nothing; he walked away gloomily; he came less and less to the Court; he looked very cross at times, although the work he had taken in hand was prospering. Whitewashed cottages were multiplying, a cricket-field had been laid out for the use of the village, Medmere was drained and sown with turnip-seed. Frank was now supposed to be an experienced agriculturist. He looked in the *Farmers' Friend* regularly. Tanner used to consult him upon a variety of subjects. What was to be done about the sheep? Pitch plaster was no good, should they try Spanish ointment? Those hurdles must be seen to, and what about the flues and the grinders down at the mill?

Notwithstanding these all-absorbing interests, Frank

no sooner received Morgan's letter, with its surprising news, than he started off at once to concert measures with the Rector. "Joe" was supposed to be at Liverpool, and Frank started for Liverpool and spent a fruitless week looking up all the discharged and invalided soldiers for ten miles round. He thought he had found some trace of the man he was in search of, but it was tiresome work, even in Dorothea's interest. John Morgan wrote that Jonah was in London, kind and helpful. Foolish Frank, who should have known better by this time, said to himself that they could have settled their business very well without Jonah's help. Frank did him justice, and wished him back in Yorkshire. May he be forgiven. Diffidence and jealousy are human failings, that bring many a trouble in their train. True love should be far beyond such pitiful preoccupations: and yet, if ever any man loved any woman honestly and faithfully, Frank Raban loved Dorothea: although his fidelity may have shown want of spirit, and his jealousy want of common sense. Dolly had vaguely hoped that Raban might have written to her, but the jealous thought that she might show Jonah his letter had prevented him from writing. John Marplot wrote that Jonah was often in S—— Street. Why did not the good Rector add that it was Mrs. Fane who asked him to come there? Dolly was rather provoked when Jonah re-appeared time after time; one day he offered himself to join them in a little expedition that Mrs. Fane had planned. Mrs. Fane was pleased to welcome the Captain and the

Rector too. Six hours of country were to set John Morgan up for his Sunday services. Dolly looked pale, some fresh air would do her good, said her friend. "Do I want to be done good to?" said Dolly, smiling.

Dolly was standing out on the balcony, carefully holding her black silk dress away from the dusty iron bars. It was a bright gentle-winded Sunday morning, and the countless bells of the district were jangling together, and in different notes calling their votaries to different shrines. The high bell striking quick and clear, the low bell with melancholy cadence, the old-fashioned parish bell swinging on in a sing-song way: a little Catholic chapel had begun its chime an hour before. From the house doors came Sunday folks—children trotting along, with their best hats and conscious little legs, mammas radiant, maid-servants running, cabs going off laden. All this cheerful jingle-jangling filled Dolly's heart with a happy sadness. It was so long since she had heard it, and it was all so dear and so familiar, as she stood listening to it all, that it was a little service in her heart of grateful love and thanks—for love and for praise; for life to utter her love for the peace which had come to her after her many troubles. She was not more happy outwardly in circumstance, but how much more happy in herself none but she herself could tell. How it had come about she could scarcely have explained; but so it was. She had ceased to struggle; the wild storm in her heart had hushed away; she was now content with

the fate, which had seemed to her so terrible in the days of her girlhood. Unloved, misunderstood, was this her fate? she had in some fashion risen above it —and she felt that the same peace and strength were hers. Peace, she knew not why; strength coming, she scarcely knew how or whence. It was no small thing to be one voice in the great chorus of voices, to be one aspiration in the great breath of life, and to know that her own wishes and her own happiness were not the sum of all her wants.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SEE YOU NOT SOMETHING BESIDE MASONRY?

And this I know: whether the one true light
Kindle to love, or wrath consume me quite,
One flash of it, within the Tavern caught,
Better than in the Temple lost outright.

On the Friday before they were to start on their little expedition, Mrs. Fane was busy; Dolly had been sitting alone for some time.

She suddenly called to old Marker, asked her to put on her bonnet and come out with her. Dolly made Marker stop a cab and they drove off; the old nurse wanted to turn back when she found out where Dolly was going, but she could not resist the girl's pleading looks. "It will do me good, Marker," said Dolly, "indeed it will. I want to see the dear old place again."

All that morning she felt a longing to see the old place once more: something seemed to tell her that she must go. One often thinks that to be in such a place would bring ease, that the sight of such a person would solve all difficulties, and one travels off, and one seeks out the friend, and it was but a fancy after all. Poor old Church House! All night long Dolly had been dreaming of her home, unwinding the skeins of the past one by one. It may have been a fancy that brought Dolly, but it was a curious chance.

They had come to the top of the lane, and Dolly got out and paid her cab. Her eyes were dim with

the past, that was coming as a veil or a shroud between her and the present. She had no faint suspicion of what was at hand. They walked on unsuspiciously to the ivy gate: suddenly Marker cried out, and then Dolly too gave a little gasp. What cruel blow had fallen? what desecrating hand had dared to touch the dear old haunt? What was this? She had not dreamt *this*. The garden wall, so sweet with jessamine, was lying low, the prostrate ivy was struggling over a heap of bricks and rubbish, tracks of wheelbarrows ran from the house to the cruel heap, the lawn was tossed up, a mound of bricks stood raised by the drawing-room windows; the windows were gone, black hollows stood in their places, a great gap ran down from Dolly's old bed-room up above to the oak-room on the terrace, part of the dining-room was gone: pathetic, black, charred, dismantled, the old house stood stricken and falling from its foundation. Dolly's heart beat furiously as she caught Marker's arm.

"What has happened?" she said; "it is not fire—it is—oh, Marker, this is too much."

Poor Marker could not say one word; the two women stood clinging to each other in the middle of the garden walk. The sky was golden, the shadows were purple among the fallen bricks.

"This is too much," Dolly repeated a little wildly, and then she broke away from Marker, crying out, "Don't come, don't come."

The workmen were gone: for some reason the place was deserted and there was no one to hear

Dolly's sobs as she impatiently fled across the lawn. Was it foolish that these poor old bricks should be so dear to her, foolish that their fall should seem to her something more than a symbol of all that had fallen and passed away? Ah no, no. While the old house stood she had not felt quite parted, but now the very place of her life would be no more; all the grief of that year seemed brought back to her when she stopped short suddenly and stood looking round and about in a scared sort of way. She was looking for something that was not any more, listening for silent voices. Dolly! cried the voices, and the girl's whole heart answered as she stood stretching out her arms towards the ulterior shores. At that minute she would have been very glad to lie down on the old stone terrace and never rise again. Time was so long, it weighed and weighed, and seemed to be crushing her. She had tried to be brave, but her cup was full, and she felt as if she could bear no more, not one heavy hour more. This great weight on her heart seemed to have been gathering from a long way off, to have been lasting for years and years; no tears came to ease this pain. Marker had sat down on the stone ledge and was wiping her grief in her handkerchief. Dolly was at her old haunt by the pond, and bending over and looking into the depth with strange circling eyes.

This heavy weight seemed to be weighing her down and drawing her to the very brink of the old pond. She longed to be at rest, to go one step

beyond the present, to be lying straight in the murky grey water, resting and at peace. Who wanted her any more? No one now. Those who had loved her best were dead; Robert had left her: every one had left her. The people outside in the lane may have seen her through the gap in the wall, a dark figure stooping among the purple shadows; she heard their voices calling, but she did not heed them; they were only living voices: then she heard a step upon the gravel close at hand, and she started back, for, looking up, she saw it was Frank Raban, who came forward. Dolly was not surprised to see him. Everything to-day was so strange, so unnatural, that this sudden meeting seemed but a part of all the rest. She threw up her hands and sank down upon the old bench.

His steady eyes were fixed upon her. "What are you doing here?" he said, frightened by the look in her face, and forgetting in his agitation to greet her formally.

"What does it all matter?" said Dolly, answering his reproachful glance, and speaking in a shrill voice: "I don't care about anything any more, I am tired out, yes, very tired," the girl repeated. She was wrought up and speaking to herself as much as to him, crying out, not to be heard, but because this heavy weight was upon her, and she was struggling to be rid of it, and reckless—she must speak to him, to anybody, to the shivering bushes, to the summer dust and silence, as she had spoken to the stagnant water of the pond. She was in a state which is not a common one, in which pain plays the part of great

joy, and excitement unloosens the tongue, forces men and women into momentary sincerity and directness carries all before it; her long self-control had broken down, she was at the end of her powers—she was only thinking of her own grief and not of him just then. As she turned her pale stone-cut face away and looked across the low laurel bushes, Frank Raban felt a pang of pity for her of which Dorothea had no conception. He came up to the bench.

"Don't lose courage," he said—"not yet; you have been so good all this time."

It was not so much what he said which touched her, as the way in which he said it. He seemed to know how terribly she had been suffering, to be in tune even with this remorseless fugue of pain repeated. His kindness suddenly overcame her, and touched her; she hid her face in her hands and burst out crying, and the tears eased and softened her strained nerves.

"It was coming here that brought it all back," she said; "and finding——" Her voice failed.

"I am very sorry," he said. "How can I forgive myself. It is all my——" He turned quite pale, stopped abruptly, and walked away for a few steps. When he came back he spoke almost in his usual voice, and then and there began to tell Dolly all that had happened, of the curious discovery which Mrs. Fane had made, of Smith's confession, and of all that it involved, that she was now the one person interested in the property, that Rhoda Parnell had no single right to Lady Sarah's inheritance. He told her

very carefully, sparing her in every way, thinking of the words which would be simplest and least likely to give pain.

"We ought to have told you before," he repeated. "We meant to spare you until all the facts were clearly ascertained. We have made a fatal mistake, and now I am only adding to your pain."

But the tears with which Dolly listened to him were not bitter, his voice was so kind, his words so manly and simple. He did not shirk the truth as some people sometimes do when they speak of sorrow, but he faced the worst with the simplicity and directness of a man who had seen it all very near. "Please don't blame yourself," she said.

If there are certain states of mind in which facts seem exaggerated, and every feeling is over-wrought, it is at these very times that people are most ready to accept the blessings of consolation. "Peace, be still," said the Divine Voice, speaking to the tossing waves. And voices come, speaking in human tones to many a poor tempest-tossed soul. It may be only a friend who speaks, only a lover perhaps, or a brother or sister's voice. Love, friendship, brotherhood give a meaning to the words. Only that day Dolly had thought that all was over, and already the miracle was working, the storm was passing from her heart.

It all seemed as a dream in the night, when she thought it over afterwards. She had not seen Frank again, but to have seen him once more made all the difference to her.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE PLAY IS PLAYED; THE CURTAIN DROPS.

In the battle of life are we all going to try for the honours of championship? If we can do our duty, if we can keep our place pretty honourably through the combat, let us say "Laus Deo" at the end of it, as the firing ceases and the night falls over the field.—ROUNDABOUT PAPERS.

COLONEL FANE was not a rich man, but he had a house which had been his father's before him, and to which he returned now and again in the intervals of service. It stood at a bend of the river, and among hollows and ivy. He looked forward to ending his work there some day, and resting for a year or two. In the meanwhile the old house was often let in summer, and Mrs. Fane looked after the repairs and necessary renovations. She sometimes spent a few hours among the sedges and shady chestnut-trees. She loved the old place—as who does not love it who has ever been there?—and discovered this sleeping bower, where one may dream of chivalry, of fairy land, or of peace on earth, or that one is sunshine, or a river washing between heavy banks; or turn one's back to the stream and see a pasture-country sliding away towards the hills, through shade and fragrant hours, with songs from the hedges and mellow echoes from the distant farms.

The little party came down, not unprepared to be happy. Mrs. Fane, who never wasted an opportunity, had also brought a little girl from her orphanage, who

was to remain for a time with the housekeeper at Queensmede—that was the name of the old house. The child was a bright little creature, with merry soft eyes flashing in wild excitement, and the kind lady was somewhat divided between her interest in some news that John Morgan was giving her and her anxiety lest little Charlotte, her god-daughter, should jump out of window.

"We have to thank the Captain here," said John Morgan, "for finding the man we were in search of; his evidence fully bears out poor Smith's dying declaration. I have sent to Tapeall," said John, shaking his head. "I find that, after all my precautions, Rhoda got a hint from him last week. However, it is all right—thanks to the Captain—as right as anything so unfortunately managed can ever be."

"I don't deserve any thanks," said Jonah. "Poor Carter found me out. He wanted to borrow 10*s*."

"When did all this happen?" said Mrs. Fane.

"Only yesterday," answered the Rector. "I telegraphed to Raban—poor fellow, he had gone off to Shoeburyness on some false scent; I left word at home in case he should call."

Dolly stooped down and held up little Charlotte to see the pretty golden fields fly past, and the sheep and the lambs frisking.

"Are they gold flowers?" said the little girl. "Is that where ladies gets their money? Is you going to be very rich?"

Dolly did not answer; she had scarcely heard what

they all were saying, so many voices were speaking to her, as she watched the flying fields and frisking lambs. Was it all to be hers? The old house was gone—and this was what she most dwelt upon—money was but little in comparison to the desolate home. Could she ever forgive Rhoda this cruel blow? Ah! she might have had it all, if she had but spared the dear home. A letter had come from Robert only that morning, and all this time Dolly was carrying it unopened in her pocket, failing courage to break the seal and open up the past.

Shadows and foreboding clouds were far away from that tranquil valley, from the shady chestnut-tree beneath which Dolly is sitting, resting and shading her eyes from the light.

When the banquet is over they get up from their feast and stroll down to the river side, through the silent village into the overgrown meadow, where green waving things are throwing their shadows, where an old half-ruined nunnery stands fronting the sun and the silver river beyond the fields.

There were nuns at Queensmede once: one might fancy a Guinevere ending her sad life there in tranquil penitence; a knight on his knees by the river; a horse browsing in the meadow. The old building still stands among wild-flowers and hay, within sight of the river bend; the deserted garden is unfenced, and the roses, straggling in the field, mingle their petals with the clover and poppies that spring luxuriantly. The stable is a gabled building with slender lancet windows, with

open doors swinging on the latch. The nuns have passed out one by one from the Lady House, so they call it still. Dolly peeped in at the dismantled walls and pictured their former occupants to herself — women singing and praying with pale sweet faces radiant in the sweet tranquillity of the old place, and yet their life seemed thin and sad somehow. It was here that she found courage at last to read Robert's letter as she stood in the doorway. She pulled it out and broke the seal:—

My Dear Dorothea,—

Notwithstanding all that has happened, I still feel that it is no common tie of friendship and interest which must always bind us together, and that it is due to you that I myself should inform you of a determination which will, as I trust, eventually contribute to everybody's happiness. After what you said to me it will, I know, be no surprise to you to have heard that I have proposed to Rhoda, and been accepted by her; but I am anxious to spare your learning from anybody but myself the fact, that we have determined to put on our marriage, and that this letter will reach you on our wedding day.

Your friend Rhoda has entirely thrown herself upon my guidance, and under the circumstances it has seemed advisable to me to urge no longer delay. My affairs require my presence in England; hers also need the most careful management. I am not satisfied with the manner in which certain investments have been disposed of—notwithstanding some—perhaps not unnatural reluctance on her part. I propose returning to Church House immediately after our wedding, where, let me tell you, my dear Dora, you will ever find a hearty welcome, and a home if need be, although I am anxious to forget the past, particularly under my present circumstances. I cannot but recall once more to you how differently events might have turned out. I have never had an opportunity of explaining that to you, but I hope you do me the justice to believe that it was not your change of fortune which affected my decision to abide by your determination. I have been most anxious to assure you of this. It was your want of trust which first made me feel how dissimilar we were in many ways, how little chance there was in my being able to influence you as a husband. Forgive me for saying that you did not understand my motives, nor do entire justice to the feelings which made me endeavour to persuade you for your own advantage as well as mine. If you had come to India when I wished it much anxiety to yourself and much sorrow would have been spared you. Now it is too late to think of what might or might not have been, only this fact remains, and do not forget it, dear Dora, that you will

never have a more sincere friend nor one more ready to advise and assist you in any difficulty than

Your affectionate cousin,

R. HENLEY.

Rhoda (did she know I was writing) would unite in most affectionate love. I find her society more and more congenial and delightful to me.

"What are you reading, Dolly?" said Jonah, coming up. "I ought to know that confounded blue paper. Has that fellow the impudence to write to you?" Then he asked more shyly, "May I see the letter?"

"No, dear Jonah," Dolly said, folding it up. "It is a kind letter, written kindly."

Then she looked hard at him and blushed a little. "This is his wedding day," she said; "that is why he wrote to me."

Dolly would not show her letter to anyone, except to Mrs. Fane. She felt that it would be commented on; she was grateful to Robert for writing it; and yet the letter made her ashamed now that she began to see him not as he was, but to judge from another standard, and to look at him with other people's eyes. In after days she scarcely ever spoke of him even to her nearest and dearest. To-day she merely repeated the news. No one made any comment in her hearing. They were anxious at first, but Dolly's face was serene, and they could see that she was not unhappy.

One thing Mrs. Fane could understand. Robert evidently knew nothing of the destruction of Church House.

"I am glad Robert had nothing to do with it," said Dolly, with a sigh.

"Will you come wiss me," said little Charlotte, running up and taking Dolly's hand. Miss Vanborough was not sorry to leave the discussion of Robert's prospects to others, and she walked away, with the little girl still holding by her hand, and went and stood for a minute on the bridge, looking down at the river and the barge floating by; it slid under her feet with its cargo of felled wood, and its wild and silent human cargo, and then it went floating away between the summer banks.

The waters deepened and wavered. Tall waving grasses were also floating and dragging upon the banks, crimson poppies starting here and there, golden iris hanging their heads by the river. Little Charlotte presently ran away, and, half sunk in the grasses, stood struggling with a daisy. A sunshiny man came leading a horse from the sleepy old barn that stood beyond the Lady House. Its old bricks were hung with green veils, and with purple and golden nets of lichen and of moss.

Dolly stopped—was it a burst of music? It was a sweet overpowering rush of honeysuckle scent coming from the deserted garden. In this pastoral landscape there was no sound louder than the lap of the water, or the flowing gurgle of the pigeons straggling from one to another moss-grown ledge. Chance lights stole from the sedge to the grassy banks, from the creek by sweet tumbled grasses to the deserted old

grange. Round about stood the rose-trees, flowering in the wilderness, dropping their blossoms; the swallows were flying about the eaves; the daisies sparkled where they caught the sunlight.

While Dolly and little Charlotte were gathering their flowers Frank Raban, who came walking along the fields by the river, had joined the others by the Lady House. Morgan's telegram had summoned him back to London, and his message had brought him on to Queensmede.

"Where is Miss Vanborough?" he asked presently.

"Don't you see her on the bridge?" said Jonah, pointing.

Frank walked on a few steps. He saw her standing on the bridge, high above the torrent. Then he saw her come slowly along, followed by her little companion. . . .

They were walking slowly away from the field and the deserted garden. As they all straggled slowly homewards with shadows at their feet, the old ivy buttresses of the walls were beginning to shine with vesper light, with deeper and crisper lines in the pure illumination all around. Dolly thought of Haydn's andante again, only here it was light that brought music out of all these instruments; silences, perfumes, and heavy creepers from the bewildering, sweet old place, overflown with birds, heaped up and falling into hollows.

Frank walked silently beside Dolly. He had come prepared to sympathise, full of concern for her, and

she did not seem to want his help or to care for it any more. That day by the pond, when she had first turned to him in her grief, he had felt nearer to her than now, when in her reserve she said no word of all that he knew she must be feeling. Could this be pride? Did she show this indifferent face to the world, was she determined that no one should guess at the secret strain? Was she treating him as the first come acquaintance? It was very proper, no doubt, and very dignified, but he was disappointed. He could not understand it. She must be unhappy, and yet as he looked at her face he saw no effort there—only peace shining from it. She had stooped before a garland of briony that was dropping with beautiful leaves, making a garland of shadows upon the bricks. She pointed it out to him.

"It is very pretty," said Raban, "but I am in no appreciative mood;" and he looked back at Jonah, who came up just then, and began admiring. Why was Jonah always with her? Why did he seem to join into all their talk. Frank was jealous of Jonah but he was still more jealous of Dorothea's confidence. There seemed to be no end to Dolly's cousins. Here was Jonah, to whom she had already given more of her confidence than to him; Jonah, who had served her effectually, while he, Frank, had done nothing; worse than nothing; Dolly, who was walking along, still looking at the bunches of briony she had gathered. It was not a very heroic mood, and I am truly ashamed of my hero's passing ill

humour, coming as it did at this inopportune moment to trouble Miss Vanborough's tardy happiness. And yet somehow it did not trouble her; she saw that Frank was silent and gloomy, but with her instinct for idealising those she loved, she supposed there was some good reason for it, and she felt that she might perhaps even try to find out what was amiss; it was no longer wrong to take an interest in all that affected him—even Dolly's conscience allowed this—and, when the others walked on, in her sweet voice she asked "if anything was wrong," and as she spoke her grey eyes opened kindly. Dolly loved to take care of the people she loved. There was a motherly instinct in all her affection.

"My only concern is for you, and for the news that Jonah Henley has told me," said Frank; "but you did not tell me yourself, so I did not like to speak of it to you."

Dolly sighed—then looked up again. "I do not know how to talk of it all," she said, "and that is why I said nothing."

"You are right!" Frank answered, "when one comes to think of it, there are no words in common language to——"

"Please don't," said Dolly, pained; then she added, "I have been so unhappy, that I must not ever pretend to feel what I am not feeling. Perhaps you may think it strange, I am happy, not unhappy, to-day. You are all so kind; everything is so kind. I hope they too will have a great deal of happiness

in their lives. Is not Jonah calling us?" Jonah was waiting for them at the gate of the house, and waving a long, shadowy arm, that seemed to reach across the road.

"Happiness," said Frank, lingering, and bitter still, and looking round. "This is the sort of thing people mean, I suppose; green pastures and still waters, and if one can be satisfied with grass, so much the better for oneself; one may enjoy all the things one didn't particularly want—and watch another man win the prize; another perhaps who doesn't even——" Frank stopped short—what was he saying? he might be giving pain, and he hated himself and his ill humour, jarring and jangling in the peaceful serenity.

But Dolly finished the sentence calmly enough. "Who doesn't care for it; perhaps the prize isn't worth having," she said very slowly. She did not think of herself until she had spoken; then suddenly her heart began to beat, and she blushed crimson; for her eyes met his, and his looks spoke plainly enough—so plainly, that Dolly's grey orbs fell beneath that fixed dreamy gaze. It seemed to look through her heart. Could he read all that she was thinking? Ah! he might read her heart, for she was only thinking as she stood there of all her friend's long fidelity and steady friendship. What had she ever done to deserve it all. And her heart seemed to answer her thought with a strange silent response. Now she might own to herself the blessing of his unfailing friendship; it was no longer a wrong to any human being. Even

if she were never anything more to him, she might openly and gratefully accept his help and his interest; acknowledge the blessing, the new life it had brought her. She had struggled so long to keep the feeling hidden away, it was an unspeakable relief to have nothing more to conceal from herself nor from others —nothing more. She knew at last that she loved him, and she was not ashamed. What a journey she had travelled since they had stood by the spring that autumn day, not a year ago; what terrible countries she had visited, and had it come to this once more? Might she love now in happiness as well as in sorrow? Was she not happy standing in this golden hollow, with the person whom she loved best in all the world? No other human being was in sight, nothing but the old shady village, floating into overflowing green, the sleepy haycocks, the empty barn, the heaping ivy on the wall, the sunlight slanting upon the silence. She did not mean to speak, but Frank, in this utter silence, heard her secret thought at last. "Don't you know?" said Dorothea. "Oh! Frank, don't you know?" Did she speak the words or look them? He could scarcely tell, only with unutterable tenderness and thankfulness in his heart he knew that she was his, that life is kind, that true hearts do come together, that one moment of such happiness and completeness lights up a whole night's wild chaos, and reveals the sweetness of a dawning world.

Jonah, who had gone on with Mrs. Fane, came to

the door to call them again, but they did not see him, and he went back into the house, where Mrs. Fane and John Morgan were hard at work upon an inventory.

"Here, let me help you," said Jonah; "I'm not too clumsy to count teacups." Little Charlotte made herself very useful by carrying a plate from one chair to another. She finally let it drop, and would have cried when it broke, if the good-natured young captain had not immediately given her the ink to hold. This mark of confidence filled her with pride, and dried her tears. "Sall I 'old it up very high?" she said. "Can you draw a ziant? I can, wiss your pen."

It took them nearly an hour to get through their task, and by this time the tea was ready in the library, the old-fashioned urn hissing and steaming, and Jonah and John Morgan were preparing to set out on their journey home. Frank went with them, and then when he was gone Dolly told her friend her story, and the two sat talking until late into the starlight.

Two days afterwards an announcement appeared in *The Times*, and the world learnt that Robert Henley and Miss Rhoda Parnell had been married at the British Embassy at Paris by special licence by the Bishop of Oronoco. The next news was that of Dolly's marriage to Frank Raban. Pebblesthwaite was very much excited. Lady Henley's indignation was boundless at first, but was happily diverted by the news of her favourite daughter Norah's engagement to Mr. Jack Redmayne.

James Brand's blue eyes twinkled a kindly sympathy, when the letter came announcing Frank's happiness. He came up to be present at the wedding.

It was in the little city church with its smoke-stained windows. John Morgan's voice failed as he read the opening words and looked down at the bent heads of the two who had met at last hand-in-hand. "In perfect love and peace," he said; and, as he said it, he felt that the words were no vain prayers.

He had no fear for them, nor had they fear for each other. Some one standing in the drizzle of the street outside saw them drive off with calm and happy faces. It was Robert Henley, who was passing through London with his wife. Philippa, who saw him, kissed her hand and would have stopped him, but he walked on without looking back. He had been to Mr. Tapeall's that morning, after a painful explanation with Rhoda —Rhoda, who was moodily sitting at the window of her room in the noisy hotel, and going over the wretched details of that morning's talk. It was true that she had sold Church House, tempted by the builder's liberal offer, and wanting money to clear the many extravagances of her Paris life; it was true that she had concealed the lawyer's letter from Robert in which she learnt that her title to the property was about to be disputed. She had hurried on their wedding, she had won the prize for which her foolish soul had longed; it was not love so much as the pride of life and of gratified vanity. These things had dazzled her, for these things this foolish little creature had sacrificed her all. Dolly might have been happy in time, even married to Robert, but for Rhoda what chance was there? Would her French kid gloves put out their primrose fingers to help her in her lonely hours; would her smart bonnets crown her home with peace and the content of a loving spirit? She lived

long enough to find out something of the truth, and to come to Dolly one day to help her in her sorest need. This was long after, when Dolly had long been living at Ravensrick, when her children were playing round about her, and the sunshine of her later life had warmed and brightened the sadness of her youth. What more shall I say of my heroine. That sweet and generous soul, ripening by degrees, slow and credulous, not embittered by the petty pains of life, faithful and tender and vibrating to many tones, is no uncommon type. Her name is one that I gave her long ago, but her real names are many, and are those of the friends whom we love.

Church House was never rebuilt. At Dolly's wish a row of model lodgings, with iron balconies, patent boilers, ventilators, and clothes hanging out to dry on every floor, have been erected on the site of the place where Lady Sarah lived, and so the kind woman's dreams and helpful schemes have come true.

"We could not put back the old house," said Dolly, "and we thought this would be the next best thing to do." The rooms are let at a somewhat cheaper rate than the crowded lodging-houses round about. People, as a rule, dislike the periodical whitewashing, and are fond of stuffing up the ventilators, but otherwise they are very well satisfied.

Dolly did not receive many wedding presents. Some time after her marriage, Rhoda sent Dolly a diamond cross; it was that one that Frank Raban had given her many years before. She was abroad at the time, and for many years neither Rhoda nor Dolly met again. Mrs. Palmer used to write home accounts of

Rhoda's beauty and fashion from Ems, and other watering-places where she used to spend her summers.

The Admiral, who was still abroad, made it an especial point, so Philippa declared, that she should spend her summers on the Continent.

One day Mrs. Raban was turning out some papers in a drawer in her husband's writing-table, when she came upon a packet that she thought must belong to herself. They were written in a familiar writing that she knew at once, for it was Henley's. They were not addressed, and Dolly could not at first imagine how these letters had come there, nor when she had received them. As she looked she was still more bewildered. They were letters not unlike some that she had received, and yet they had entirely passed from her mind; presently turning over a page she read, not her own name on the address, but that of Emma Penfold, and a sentence—"It is best for your welfare that we should not meet again," wrote Henley. "I am not a marrying man myself: circumstances render it impossible. May you be as happy in your new life. You will have an excellent husband, and one who . . . ."

"What have you got there?" said Frank, who had come in.

"Oh, Frank, don't ask me," said Dolly, hastily going to the fire that was burning in the grate and flinging the packet into the flames; then she ran up to him, and clung hold of his arm for a minute. She could not speak.

Frank looked at the burning packet—at the open drawers—and then he understood it all. "I thought

I had burnt those letters long ago," he said; and stooping he took his wife's hand in his and kissed it.

* * * * *

As I write the snow lies thick upon the ground outside, upon the branches of the trees, upon the lawns. Here, within, the fire leaps brightly in its iron cage; the children cluster round the chair by the chimney corner, where the mother sits reading their beloved fairy tales. The hearth was empty once—the home was desolate; but time after time, day by day, we see the phœnix of home and of love springing from the dead ashes; hopes are fulfilled that seemed too sweet to dream of; love kindles and warms chilled hearts to life. Take courage, say the happy to those in sorrow and trouble; are there not many mansions even here? seasons in their course; harvests in their season, thanks be to the merciful ordinance that metes out sorrow and peace, and longing and fulfilment, and rest after the storm.

Take courage, say the happy—the message of the sorrowful is harder to understand. The echoes come from afar, and reach beyond our ken. As the cry passes beyond us into the awful unknown, we feel that this is, perhaps, the voice in life that reaches beyond life itself. Not of harvests to come, not of peaceful home hearths do they speak in their sorrow. Their fires are out, their hearths are in ashes, but see, it was the sunlight that extinguished the flame.

THE END.

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